

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CULTS

by Robert C. Walton

**Grades 9-12
Year 3
Quarter 2**

WHAT IS A CULT AND WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN THEM?

Lesson Aim

To define the term “cult” and gain an understanding of what makes them attractive to people.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 4:1 - “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”

Lesson Background

We live in an era in which religious cults are active and growing in America (and also in other parts of the world). Where do these groups come from? How do they get started? What do they teach? Why are people attracted to them? How can the church combat their influence? These are some of the questions with which we will be dealing during this quarter. While it is true that the best way to train someone to recognize counterfeit money is to make him intimately familiar with every detail of the real thing, it certainly does not hurt to familiarize him with the techniques used by counterfeiters at the same time. Thus we study error to be able to recognize it more easily.

We also study error to gain a greater appreciation for the truth. One who understands the distinctions between sound doctrine and heresy is in a position to exercise greater discernment than one who does not. It is also possible that the study of the strengths of heretical groups will open up our eyes to some of the failings of our own churches.

Finally, we study error in order to combat it. This combat can be carried out in three ways - prevention, polemic, and witness. The man who knows the cults and their teachings can guard others against being taken in by their heresies, can answer their arguments with biblical truth, and can present the Word of God in a positive way to the cultist.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by explaining to your students that this quarter of lessons will be devoted to a study of cults. Then ask them to define the term “cult.” You will probably discover that your students display a considerable amount of fuzzy thinking on this subject. Then have them list as many cults as they can think of. Does this help them to come up with a definition? Tell the class that in today’s introductory session, we will try to answer three basic questions: What is a cult? What makes cults different from one another? Why do people join cults?

1. What is a cult?

A dictionary definition of the word “cult” refers simply to “a religious system or ritual of worship,” and is thus singularly unhelpful. We are using the term, not to refer to all religious groups, but to distinguish certain religious groups from others. Thus we will define a cult as “a relatively small, formally organized religious group that is an offshoot of a major religion, and often is built around a strong leader or authority figure.” Note the following aspects of this definition:

A. Cults are relatively small

Most major religions (Judaism being the most notable exception) have well over 100 million adherents, while few groups that would be called cults have more than 10 million, and most have far fewer.

B. Cults are formally organized

We are talking about recognizable groups with recognizable memberships. Thus, while astrology may be a cultic practice and there may be Satanic cults, astrology and Satanism may not in themselves be called cults.

C. Cults are offshoots of major religions

As we will see later, there are “Christian” cults, Hindu cults, Buddhist cults, Muslim cults, etc. Very few cult groups do not trace their origins to major religions (those that do not are usually some variety of nature-worshippers).

D. Cults are built around authoritarian leaders

This is true of every cult we will study this quarter, and is certainly a danger sign for any church. Authoritarian leaders turn people to themselves rather than to Christ, and any church leader who seeks to exercise dictatorial powers over his flock is moving in the direction of creating a cult.

2. What makes cults different from one another?

There are several key distinguishing features that can be used to classify various cults:

A. Their attitude toward outsiders

Cults may be classified as either exclusive or inclusive. Exclusive cults believe they alone possess the truth, and that they alone are going to heaven (Jehovah's Witnesses are a good example). Inclusive cults are universalistic, believing all ultimately will be saved, either because there is truth in all religions (Baha'i) or because all will ultimately come around to their way of thinking (Unification Church, and to some extent Mormons).

B. Their parent religion

We saw earlier that all major religions have produced cults. Examples include Christianity (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Science, Adventism, etc.), Islam (Baha'i), Hinduism (Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation), and Buddhism (Lamaism, Zen). Most cults share many doctrines and practices with their parent religions.

C. Their sources of truth

Aside from the nature-worshippers, most cults claim some supernatural source of revelation, usually in written form. As a general rule, these groups tend to add something to the written revelation claimed by their parent religions, whatever they may be. Among those groups that have sprung from Christianity, Mormons have their *Book of Mormon* along with other books and a continued source of revelation in the church's presidency, Christian Scientists claim divine inspiration for *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and Adventists maintain that Ellen G. White was a prophetess and that the gift of prophecy continues in the church today. The result of this is that such groups invariably interpret Scripture, if they acknowledge it at all, through the "spectacles" of their extrabiblical revelation, whatever it may be.

D. Their method of salvation

Biblical Christianity is the only religion that believes in salvation by grace. All man-made religious systems believe, naturally enough, in some form of salvation by works (ask your students why this is necessarily so). Among the cults, some see the "works" that need to be done as active in nature, while others emphasize passive contemplation. Extremes range from the incessant door-knocking of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the hours of meditation required of devotees of Hare Krishna.

3. Why do people join cults?

There are, of course, many different reasons why people join cults. Despite individual differences, however, certain generalizations can be made. The value of these generalizations is that they reveal weaknesses in the ministries of our own churches that can stimulate us to greater faithfulness to Scripture. The following representative sampling of reasons should give your class some idea of what drives people into the arms of the cults.

A. Dead churches

Though this is a characteristic we generally associate with liberal denominations, it is not absent among those churches that teach evangelical doctrine. Where love is absent and worship is nothing but empty ritual, the cults find fertile soil.

B. Materialism

Particularly in the 1960s, many young people fled mainline churches to get away from the materialism of their parents. Even though many young people today are even more materialistic than their parents, cults still appeal to those who want a simpler lifestyle not dominated by things.

C. Humanism

The mystically-oriented cults, in particular, tend to attract those who have found the this-worldly emphasis of the humanists wanting. They seek something beyond the tangible, beyond the experience of the senses, and beyond the powers of man. They search for God, but the God they seek is one of their own making.

D. Experience

Young people who are looking for something new and different, a departure from the old ritual and routine, are often attracted to the cults. The desire for novelty often draws young people to some of the more bizarre manifestations of religion.

E. Power

Modern philosophy has left many with a feeling of helplessness and meaninglessness in an empty world. Such despair drives many to seek the remedies offered by the cults, who hold out the possibility, not only of control over one's own destiny, but also of power over the destiny of others.

F. Authority

In a world where people are told that "anything goes" and that they are free to "do their own thing," quite a few find themselves threatened and insecure. They want more than anything else to be told what to do, to have the security of someone who cares enough to tell them what is right and wrong. Cults readily welcome such seekers and gladly give them direction.

G. Love

The greatest security sought by many is the unconditional acceptance of a group of people who really care about them. Their loneliness and rejection by those around them drive them right into the open arms of the cults.

Conclusion

The tragedy of all this, of course, is that the only place where these needs may be truly met is in Jesus Christ. Those who go to the cults find a counterfeit, satisfying though that counterfeit may seem to them. Two conclusions should be drawn at this point, both of which should be kept in mind throughout the rest of the course. The first is that the emotional needs of these people should be being met in the church. Churches should not only be meeting the needs of their own people, but also reaching out to the needy members of their communities who are searching for what only Christ can give. The second conclusion is that, because the cults are meeting the surface needs of the people who come to them, they are a very difficult mission field indeed. Not only are members of the cults satisfied by their experience, but they are often thoroughly prepared to answer any objections raised by Christians who are seeking to witness to them.

MORMONS - HISTORY

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, commonly known as the Mormons, and to help them understand the historical conditions in the Christian church that contributed to the growth of the Mormons.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 4:2 - “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

Lesson Background

The first of the cults we will be studying this quarter is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, commonly known as the Mormons. The group officially began in the year 1830 in New York state, a time and place of great religious upheaval. The region in which Mormonism began was known as the Burned-Over District. The name was given because of the large number of emotionally-charged revivals that had swept through the region, producing many decisions but few real conversions. The preaching of men such as Charles G. Finney, with his New Measures in evangelism, produced great emotional excitement, but ultimately suffered from the law of diminishing returns. The excitement could not be sustained, and when the emotions grew stale, people turned to something new. One of those new things being offered was the Mormon Church.

We will be spending two weeks looking at the Mormons. This week we will examine their history, while next week our focus will be upon their doctrine. Your students should find both to be interesting, but the value of the lessons should extend beyond satisfying intellectual curiosity. Teachers should be careful

to impress upon students both the subtlety of the devil's deceit and the ease with which people fall into heresy. Students should be encouraged to be watchful, not only for modern-day Joseph Smiths, but also for the seductive doctrines all around us that would glorify man.

Lesson Procedure

Today's lesson will involve very little discussion, since its content is largely historical in nature. Students should find it interesting, however, especially because of some of the more bizarre events associated with the early years of Mormonism.

1. The historical context of Mormonism

Mormonism had its origins in the Burned-Over District, an area of the country given this name because of the intense revival activity that took place there in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Revival preachers such as Charles G. Finney played on the emotions of their listeners, manipulating them into emotional decisions that were often repeated year after year. The religious "burn-out" that resulted provided fertile ground for the growth of new cults, and it should come as no surprise that all four major American cults that began in the nineteenth century grew up in this same general area.

2. The formative early years

Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of Mormonism, was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont. His family later moved to Manchester, New York, right in the heart of the Burned-Over District. In the midst of one siege of revival fever, the family joined the Presbyterian Church, but 15-year-old Joseph was uncertain. Claiming the promise of James 1:5, he went out in the woods one day to pray. According to his own account of the incident that followed, he saw a vision of God the Father and God the Son, both in human form. When he asked them which church he should join, they told him that all churches were abominations, and that he should join none of them. Shortly thereafter, he shared the content of his vision with some local clergymen, who refused to take him seriously (a reaction that he describes as "bitter persecution").

The next important event in the life of Joseph Smith occurred three years later, in 1823. One night, after going to bed, he supposedly was visited by an angel named Moroni, who told him about a book written on gold plates that was buried in a nearby hill called Cumorah. Buried with the plates was a set of spectacles containing the Urim and Thummim, stones used for divining in the Old Testament, which would enable the wearer to translate the writing on the plates. The vision was repeated three times that night. The next day, Smith went out to the designated hill and found the plates where the angel said they were, but was forbidden by the angel to take the plates at that time.

In the years between 1823 and 1827, Smith made his living through confidence schemes. These included convincing farmers that he could locate treasure on their property, telling them he had found a trove, but when they dug on the spot and found nothing he insisted that the treasure had been guarded by a magic salamander that had buried the treasure deeper in the earth. The fact of the matter is that Smith never left the confidence game; he simply found one that worked extraordinarily well - Mormonism.

According to Smith's testimony, written many years after the events supposedly occurred, he was actually entrusted with the plates by Moroni on September 22, 1827. At this point Smith took the plates and his new wife, Emma Hale, and moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania. Here, with the help of several of his followers, he translated the plates and returned them to Moroni on May 2, 1828.

It should be noted that the translation process was not without its snags. When the plates were being translated, only Smith actually saw or handled them. He passed translations out through a curtain behind which he was working to his assistants outside, who then transcribed the work. Though several witnesses later claimed to have seen the plates, they “saw” them in a vision, and several of the witnesses later rescinded their statements and left the church.

One particularly notable incident associated with the translation process involved a farmer named Martin Harris, who put up much of the money to finance the translation. To ensure the legitimacy of the project, he requested and received from Smith a transcription of one of the plates. He then took this transcription to Charles Anthon, a professor of ancient languages at Columbia University in New York City. By his own account, Anthon recognized the transcription as a fraud and suspected that Harris was the target of a sophisticated con job. Anthon not only denied that the transcription was in “Reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics,” as Smith had claimed, but also maintained that the material on the page had been copied from an encyclopedia article on ancient languages and calendars. Despite Anthon’s denials, Harris continued to support the project, and the translation was published in 1830 as the *Book of Mormon*. On April 6 of the same year, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was officially incorporated with Smith as its president.

The gold plates never existed, of course. The *Book of Mormon* was to a large extent plagiarized from a novel about the early history of the Western Hemisphere written by Solomon Spaulding. The manuscript was lost, presumably stolen by one of Smith’s early followers who had contact with Spaulding. Several decades ago a page of the manuscript was located in the Mormon archives in Salt Lake City, and handwriting experts believe the penmanship to be Spaulding’s.

3. From the start of the church to the death of Joseph Smith

In the years directly preceding the founding of the church, Joseph Smith continued to have visions. Two of these involved establishing two levels of Mormon priesthood. In 1829, John the Baptist appeared to Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the Aaronic Priesthood, which gave them the authority to remit sins by baptism. Later in the same year, the same two men received from Peter, James and John the Melchizedek Priesthood, which gave the recipients the authority to impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. Experiences such as these began to give Cowdery ideas, and he soon began seeing visions of his own. At this point, however, Smith decided that a missionary was needed on the Western frontier, and Cowdery was sent packing to Ohio.

Mormon history at this point becomes increasingly troubled. The cult grew rapidly, but Smith was arrested twice for disorderly conduct, though he was acquitted both times. When the “persecution” got to be too much, Smith and his followers moved to Kirtland, Ohio. The Mormons settled down in Kirtland, but before too long a bank they had established failed, and the angry citizens ran the Mormons out of town, and Smith was tarred and feathered.

Their next home was in Independence, Missouri. Here they decided to avoid persecution by forming a private militia for self-defense, which they called the Danites. The territorial governor was not pleased with this idea, however, and the Mormons were again driven out in the context of what have been called the Mormon Wars. This time, Smith got across the border just in time to avoid being arrested on a charge of treason, which would have carried with it the death penalty.

They next settled in the Illinois Territory, starting their own settlement on the banks of the Mississippi in 1839. Smith named the town Nauvoo, which he claimed was the Hebrew word for “beautiful place” (no such Hebrew word exists). The population grew rapidly, reaching 15,000, making it the largest

city in the territory (larger than Chicago at the time). All during this time he continued to have revelations, many of which were incorporated into *Doctrine and Covenants*. He also produced what he called a translation of an ancient Egyptian manuscript called *The Pearl of Great Price*. The period in Nauvoo also saw the expansion of Smith's pretensions to grandiose proportions. Not only did he accumulate for himself a large number of wives, but he also declared his candidacy for the office of President of the United States in 1844. When the Mormon newspaper in Nauvoo accused Smith of being power-hungry, the newspaper office mysteriously burned to the ground. The territorial governor subsequently arrested Smith and several other of the principals and put them in the Carthage, Illinois, jail. Several days later, on June 27, 1844, an angry mob stormed the jail and Smith was shot to death.

4. From Brigham Young to the present

After the murder of Smith and his brother Hyrum, the leadership of the church fell to Brigham Young (though a minority among the Mormons insisted that the leadership must remain in the Smith family; this minority returned to Independence, Missouri and formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints). The main body of the Mormons was driven from Nauvoo in 1846, at which time Young led them outside the borders of the United States into Mexican territory. They settled by a large lake in the West and named their new settlement Salt Lake City.

The Mormons were excellent pioneers and prospered in their new location, away from the "persecution" they had faced whenever they had settled in proximity to others. The desert bloomed like a rose. But their isolation was to be short-lived. In 1849, the United States gained possession of the Utah Territory as a result of the Mexican War. The Mormons opposed statehood, fearing renewed persecution. Brigham Young served for many years as territorial governor, but statehood did not arrive until the church renounced its practice of polygamy.

The Mormons steadfastly maintained that they practiced polygamy because of a revelation from God to Joseph Smith (ironically enough, the *Book of Mormon* explicitly condemns it). After repeated unsuccessful attempts to get the Congress and Supreme Court to recognize the legitimacy of Mormon practice, the president of the church received a somewhat convenient new revelation in 1890 indicating that God had told him that polygamy was not intended for the present day. Statehood followed soon thereafter, in 1896. Despite the fact that polygamy is no longer sanctioned by the church, a small minority of Mormons continue the practice today.

The Mormon Church today is a growing body of perhaps fifteen million (more than half outside the United States), and dominates the Utah-Nevada region of the country politically and economically (one Mormon, Mitt Romney, was the Republican candidate for President in 2012). The church engages in aggressive missionary activity and has been becoming increasingly active overseas, despite some inherent drawbacks created by the doctrine of the church, which, as we will see next week, is strongly geared toward the Western Hemisphere.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

MORMONS - HISTORY

1. Who was the founder of the Mormon Church? What were the religious conditions in which he was brought up?
2. What aspects of the tale of the golden plates tend to cast suspicion on its authenticity? Why?
3. Why were the Mormons persecuted? Was this persecution justified, or did they bring it on themselves?
4. Which of the characteristics of cults that we studied last week are true of the Mormons? What do you think motivates people to join this particular group?

MORMONS - DOCTRINE

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the basic teachings of the Mormon Church, and thus prepare them to respond to those teachings.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 4:3 - “They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”

Lesson Background

Our lesson last week covered a brief history of the Mormons. Our task today is to discuss the major teachings of the church. The purpose of the lesson is not merely to inform students concerning the unusual doctrines of this cult, but also to help them understand where these doctrines came from, how they relate to one another, and how they deviate from the teachings of Scripture. We will begin the lesson with a summary of the Mormon view of the history of the Western Hemisphere, which is the major subject of the *Book of Mormon*. We will then proceed to go through a typical systematic theology outline (as we will do with most of the cults we cover), noting as we do the teachings of the Mormons in each of those key areas.

The main applications that you as a teacher should focus on include the danger of viewing Scripture through man-made “spectacles” (other Mormon scriptures and continued revelation through the church presidency), and the relationship of Mormon teachings concerning the goodness of man, justification by works, and universal salvation. It is also important to point out to your students that the outward conservatism and morality of the Mormons often seduces those who admire their lifestyle, but that their

motivations for godly living are not pleasing to God. In addition, the Mormons are often admired for their emphasis on family life, but students should be aware of the warped view of the family that undergirds Mormon practice.

Lesson Procedure

Review with your students the story of the discovery of the golden plates by Joseph Smith that we talked about in last week's lesson. Note that this week we will be talking about what the Mormon Church believes, and that we will start with the content of the *Book of Mormon*, which is allegedly the translation of the golden plates.

1. The History of the Western Hemisphere

According to the *Book of Mormon*, a man by the name of Jared took his family and left Mesopotamia around 2250 B.C., at the time of the Tower of Babel. They crossed the Pacific Ocean and settled in Central America, where they built a thriving civilization. After some time, however, warfare broke out among the descendants of Jared and they killed one another off.

Later, at the time of the Babylonian Captivity (around 600 B.C.), a Jewish prophet named Lehi crossed the Atlantic with his family and settled in South America. Lehi had two sons, Nephi and Laman. Nephi was a godly man, and his descendants followed in his footsteps, but Laman and his descendants after him rebelled against the Lord. Because of this rebellion, God cursed the Lamanites with dark skin (the origin of the American Indians, whom the Mormons therefore believe to be Jewish).

The Nephites migrated northward into North America and established a prosperous civilization there. When Jesus died on the cross (A.D. 34 according to the *Book of Mormon*), He came and visited the godly Nephites during the time He was in the tomb. While He was with them, He preached the entire Sermon on the Mount (verbatim in King James English).

Warfare between the Lamanites and Nephites eventually wiped the Nephites out. Among the last of the Nephite survivors was Mormon, who chronicled the history of the Western Hemisphere and wrote it down on golden plates. These plates were then entrusted to his son, Moroni, who shortly before his own death in A.D. 385 buried the plates in central New York, where they remained concealed until he came back as an angel to reveal their location to Joseph Smith in 1823.

2. Mormon Doctrine

A. Scripture

The Mormons accept four books as canonical - the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*. The church maintains that the *Book of Mormon* was prophesied in Ezekiel 37:16-17 (they claim the Bible is the stick of Judah and the *Book of Mormon* is the stick of Ephraim, since the Bible concerns itself largely with the descendants of the Southern Kingdom and the *Book of Mormon* deals with the descendants of those from the northern tribes). They ignore the fact that God Himself explains the meaning of the prophesy to Ezekiel, and that the explanation refers to peoples, not to books. *The Pearl of Great Price* is supposedly the translation of an ancient Egyptian manuscript but, unfortunately for the church, and unlike the golden plates, this manuscript is still in existence. Scholars who have examined it have asserted that the manuscript has nothing to do with Joseph Smith's alleged translation, but

that it instead is an Egyptian burial manual. *Doctrine and Covenants* is a compilation of revelations received by various presidents of the church over the years. In addition to these four books, the church also believes that the presidents of the church continue to receive revelation from God.

B. God

At first glance, Mormons may appear to be Trinitarian, but in reality they are polytheistic. They believe, on the basis of the initial vision of Joseph Smith, that God has a body of flesh and bone. In fact, they believe that God was once a man as we are now, that his name was Adam (yes, the Adam of Genesis 1), and that he now inhabits the planet Kolob. In a similar fashion, they believe that righteous men ultimately become gods.

C. Christ

Mormons accept the deity of Christ, but deny his uniqueness. In fact, they use references to Christ to prove Mormon doctrines about man (e.g., pre-existence). They believe that the death of Christ has removed the sin inherited from Adam from all men. The birth of Christ is thought to be the result of the physical union of Mary and Adam, who by then had reached godhood. The deity of Christ is not perceived as unique, since all men may become gods.

D. Holy Spirit

Unlike the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is thought to be a “personage of spirit,” immaterial, and always referred to as “it.” In practice, this differs little from the notion of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force that we will meet later in the teachings of several other cults.

E. Man

Man is believed to exist prior to his conception. This pre-existence begins when God-couples, who remain together after death (see section on marriage) beget spirit-children, who then go through a probationary period prior to being placed in earthly bodies. Spirit-children who fail the probationary period are born into black bodies (this is why until the 1970s blacks were excluded from the Mormon priesthood).

The Fall of man is seen as a good thing, necessary for the propagation of the race (Joseph Smith seems to have thought that sexual intercourse was the original sin). Had Adam and Eve not sinned, bodies for the spirit-children could never have been produced. In addition to the Fall being seen as a good thing, man in his present state is seen as essentially good. Because children are not sinners, they need not be baptized until they reach the age of accountability.

F. Salvation

Mormons believe that five steps are necessary for salvation:

i. Faith

Faith to a Mormon involves believing that God will reward your good works, and also that Joseph Smith was God’s prophet.

ii. Repentance

Turning away from sin is a necessary part of salvation.

iii. Baptism

This must be by immersion, and must be done by an official of the Mormon Church. Mormons usually are baptized at the age of eight, which they consider to be the age of accountability. Baptism is thought to be necessary for the remission of sins.

iv. Laying on of Hands

This too must be done by an official of the church and is needed for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

v. Good Works

Obedience to the law of God is essential to retain one's salvation. Mormons blatantly affirm that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a perversion that has caused nothing but evil in the church.

G. The Church

Mormons are in one sense exclusivists because they believe that they alone possess the truth. In another sense they are inclusivists, however, because they believe that all can eventually be saved and that all may advance to godhood.

The church believes in Apostolic Succession and maintains that the true church did not exist from the time of the death of the last of the apostles until the ordination of Joseph Smith. Two levels of priesthood exist in the church (Aaronic and Melchizedek), to which all adult males in good standing may be admitted (until recently blacks were excluded), at which time they receive the title "elder."

Since baptism is necessary for salvation and the church did not exist between A.D. 95 and 1830, Mormons believe that any church member may be baptized for dead non-Mormon relatives (on the basis of I Corinthians 15:29). This is the reason for the extensive genealogical records kept by the church in Salt Lake City.

H. Eschatology

i. Individual Eschatology

Mormons believe that all people have a second chance for salvation after death. For all practical purposes this results in universalism. Mormons do not believe in Hell, maintaining instead that "eternal punishment" is God's punishment, since God is eternal. All men may gradually advance to godhood, some faster than others. Women who have participated in celestial marriages will be exalted with their husbands, while all others will be relegated to perpetual servant status. This is one of the reasons why Mormon marriage is considered so necessary.

ii. General Eschatology

Mormons believe that when Christ returns, He will rule for a thousand years from dual thrones in Jerusalem and Independence, Missouri. During this time apostate Israel (the American Indians) will be converted.

In eternity, human beings will be assigned to one of three heavenly kingdoms: Celestial (for good Mormons), Terrestrial (for moral non-Mormons), and Telestial (for the wicked). As previously noted, all will then have the opportunity to work their way up.

3. Mormon Practice

A. Morality

Mormons are very strict about moral issues. Their ethical restrictions would satisfy most fundamentalists. In addition, they abstain from liquor, tobacco, coffee, and tea.

B. Worship

Mormons observe the Sabbath strictly on Sunday, tithe their incomes to the church, and fast one day out of the month. They are very aggressive in missionary work, and most young people in the church donate two years of service to the church in exchange for only room and board.

C. Marriage

Mormons believe that marriages performed in a Mormon temple are valid for time and eternity. Children may also be sealed to their parents for all eternity in a temple ceremony. Though the church no longer officially endorses polygamy, it fits into their doctrinal structure. Not only do they believe that Jesus was a polygamist (He was married to Mary and Martha of Bethany, along with Mary Magdalene, and the marriage at Cana when He turned water into wine was His own), but they also see polygamy as an act of mercy toward women. It both allows more women to advance to godhood and does a more efficient job of providing bodies for the spirit-children to enter (as noted before, the *Book of Mormon* condemns polygamy, in Jacob 2:24).

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

MORMONS - DOCTRINE

1. How do the Mormons justify their claim that the American Indians are really Jews?
2. What are the “spectacles” through which the Mormons interpret Scripture? Why is such a procedure dangerous? Why does it always lead to distortion?
3. In what ways do the Mormons deny the uniqueness of Christ?
4. In what ways do the Mormons believe that good works are necessary for salvation?
5. In what ways does the Mormon Church degrade women? How does this relate to the teachings of the church with regard to polygamy?
6. If you were trying to witness to a Mormon, what verses of Scripture would you use? How would you counter the distinctive doctrines of the Mormon Church?

ADVENTISTS - HISTORY

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the history of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the historical context out of which it grew.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 4:4 - “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving . . .”

Lesson Background

Among all of the religious groups we will be studying, none is more controversial than the Seventh-Day Adventists. The controversy arises, not because of the peculiarity of the cult, but rather because of its closeness in many respects to evangelical Christianity. In fact, not all would even agree that Adventism should be classified as a cult at all. Cult expert Walter Martin is among those who in recent years altered their opinions and are now willing to consider the Adventist Church a legitimate evangelical denomination. This question is one that we will deal with more directly next week, when we consider the doctrine of the group, but it is important to keep the question in mind as we study its history, as well.

The Adventist Church, like the Mormons, grew out of the religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening. The revival fervor in the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War spawned many unusual religious groups. With the Mormons, we saw a group that grew out of the religious confusion surrounding the highly-emotional nature of the revival. With the Adventists, we see a group that develops from another major theme of the Awakening - the Second Coming of Christ. There have been many eras in the history of the Church where attention has been focused on the Second Coming. The nineteenth

century was certainly one of those eras, especially for the church in America. The enthusiasm associated with this renewed interest in eschatology produced some unusual teachings and practices, for which the Adventists provide a good example.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by reminding the students of what the religious atmosphere was like in America in the early part of the nineteenth century. Ask them what the Burned-Over District was. Then tell them that evangelistic preaching was not the only hallmark of this period in American history; another important characteristic of the age was a tremendous interest in the Second Coming of Christ. It is this interest in particular that paved the way for the founding of the group we will be considering for the next two weeks, the Seventh-Day Adventists.

The study will be undertaken in two parts. We will look first at four important early leaders, and then look at developments in the church in the twentieth century.

1. Early Adventist Leaders

A. William Miller (1782-1849)

It is somewhat inaccurate to refer to William Miller as an Adventist leader, since he never claimed to be an Adventist, died before the church was founded, and did not espouse many of its key doctrines. Yet the followers of Miller ultimately formed the Adventist Church, and one of his teachings became the key element in the development of one of Adventism's most distinctive doctrines.

Miller was born into a Christian home, but like so many of the young people in the years following the American Revolution, he turned to Deism, the belief popular in that day that asserted that God had created the world, but had then let it run on its own, like some great machine, without any divine intervention. When Miller was converted in 1816, at the age of 34, he wanted to understand the teachings of the Bible for himself, without being led astray by the opinions of others. He therefore decided to go off by himself and study the Bible with nothing except a concordance to guide him (ask your students if they think this was a good idea, and why). Without benefit of any formal education, he then spent two years in seclusion, studying the Scriptures. At the end of this two-year period, he came to the remarkable conclusion that the return of Christ was going to occur in 1843.

The conclusion at which Miller arrived was based on Daniel 8:14. He maintained that the 2300 days mentioned in the verse were really 2300 years (not that unusual, really, since scholars generally consider the seventy "weeks" in Daniel 9 to be seventy periods of seven years; his interpretation is wrong, however, since the 2300 days are actual days referring to the period of the Maccabean Revolt), and that the 2300 years started with the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. (the same starting point as the prophecy in Daniel 9, though he had the wrong date; Artaxerxes' decree was actually issued in 445 B.C.). He also concluded that the cleansing of the sanctuary referred to in the verse was the Second Coming of Christ. By adding 2300 years to 457 B.C., Miller came to the conclusion that Christ was going to return in the year 1843.

Miller kept his views to himself until 1831, when he was ordained as a Baptist minister (Baptists in those days had no educational requirements for pastors; many do not even today). He then began preaching his discovery throughout the Northeast and gathered around himself a large following, eagerly anticipating the return of Christ. The year 1843 came and went, and nothing happened. Early in 1844, however, one of

Miller's followers discovered an error in his calculations. Since there was no year 0, the addition of 2300 years to 457 B.C. produces, not 1843, but 1844! The prediction was then further refined. Since the only event in the ceremonial law of the Old Testament that could be called the cleansing of the sanctuary would be the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice, Miller concluded that the big day would have to be the Day of Atonement, which happened to fall on October 22, 1844. Enthusiasm grew greater than ever before. Many sold their property, quit their jobs, and waited in white robes on a mountaintop for an event that never occurred, and that came to be known among Adventists as the Great Disappointment. Needless to say, when Christ did not appear as expected, Miller's following dissipated quickly, and he died in obscurity five years later. Several groups of his followers remained together, however, and later formed the Seventh-Day Adventists. Though Miller was a sincere believer, guilty of no more than sloppy exegesis, his association of the Second Coming of Christ with the Day of Atonement set the stage for one of Adventism's most serious heresies.

B. Hiram Edson

Hiram Edson was one of Miller's followers, and he remained alone to pray after the Great Disappointment. While he was praying, he saw a vision of Christ entering the Heavenly Sanctuary. Like the High Priest in the Old Testament, He was passing from the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies, bearing His own blood, with which the sanctuary was to be cleansed. Edson concluded that Miller had the right date, but the wrong event. October 22, 1844 was not the date of the Second Coming of Christ, but rather the date upon which the Investigative Judgment was to begin. This doctrine, as we will see next week, is one of the key teachings of the Adventist Church. They believe that Christ is presently cleansing the sanctuary by examining the works of all who have ever lived to determine who is worthy of the resurrection of the dead. Those who are worthy will then have their sins placed upon the head of the Scapegoat, whom Adventists believe to be Satan (make sure your students see that this blatantly implies salvation by works).

C. Joseph Bates

Joseph Bates was another Millerite, and in 1847 he wrote a tract that provided the other major distinctive of the Adventists. This tract insisted that the Mark of the Beast mentioned in Revelation 14:6-12 was Sunday worship, which he claimed had been instituted by the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church (the Beast). He also claimed that the message of the third angel implied that only those who worshiped on Saturday (the Sabbath) were faithful to God. In another tract in 1849, he identified the Adventists as the 144,000 who bore the mark of God, which he maintained was Saturday worship.

D. Ellen G. White (1827-1915)

The person responsible for pulling these disparate elements together was Ellen G. White. Her family joined the Millerite movement in 1842 when she was fifteen years old, and they were promptly excommunicated from the Methodist Church as a result. In the months following the Great Disappointment (remember, she was only 17 at the time), she saw numerous visions commanding her to write and teach. Two years later she married Adventist minister James White. She soon came to be acknowledged by the group as a prophetess and recipient of divine revelation. It was under her leadership that the various Millerite groups united in 1860 to form the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which was officially incorporated in 1863. During the remainder of her long life, she wrote over forty books, along with numerous articles and pamphlets. She was also an advocate of health foods, which led to the founding of the Kellogg and Post cereal companies by Adventist businessmen. Her teachings laid the foundation for the Adventist Church. In recent years, evidence of extensive plagiarism in her writings has caused controversy among Adventist groups.

2. Adventists in the Twentieth Century

The Adventist Church moved its headquarters to Washington D.C. in 1903, then to Silver Spring Maryland in 1989. Though the teachings of the group have become more moderate in recent years, the distinctive teachings that mark their early history are still an important part of their doctrine. In fact, in the 1950s an Australian Adventist by the name of Desmond Ford stirred up a lot of trouble in the church by challenging some of those distinctives. Ford was a professor at an Adventist college in Australia, and he began questioning some of the church's distinctives, such as the almost infallible status accorded the prophecies of Mrs. White, and began affirming the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as taught by the Reformers. As a result, he lost his teaching position, and was strongly censured by the Adventist leadership. The Adventists ultimately fragmented into an evangelical branch and a traditionalist branch, with the latter adhering strictly to the prophecies of Ellen G. White while the former, aside from a few distinctives such as the denial of Hell and seventh-day worship, are often accepted in Christian circles.

The church today operates extensive publishing and media ministries, along with one of the largest non-Catholic parochial school systems in the world. They are very active missionaries (the church claims a membership of 18.5 million worldwide, with 1.2 million in the United States), and have sought for years to gain acceptance as a legitimate Protestant and evangelical church.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT ADVENTISTS - HISTORY

1. What was the religious environment like in which Adventism developed? How was it like and unlike the time in which we live?

2. William Miller obviously did not take seriously the warning of Jesus that no one could know the time of His Second Coming. Why do people so often try to predict what Jesus said could not be known?

3. Was William Miller's idea of studying the Bible alone, with no help from other people or other books, a good one? What are the dangers that arise when one makes the understanding of the Bible the result of "one's own interpretation"?

4. Why do you think so many of the cults result from people who see visions? Where do you think these visions come from? How does this fit in with what we saw earlier about cults that interpret the Bible through their own set of "spectacles"?

5. Do you think the Adventists should be considered a cult? Why or why not? [NOTE: We will talk more about this next week.]

ADVENTISTS - DOCTRINE

Lesson Aim

To give students an understanding of the basic teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and enable them to compare these teachings with those of the Word of God.

Memory Verse

I Timothy 4:5 - “. . . because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer.”

Lesson Background

As noted last week, the Adventists are unique among the cults included in our study. We will find this week that there are many areas of doctrine upon which the Adventist Church is quite evangelical. As Reformed Baptists, we will find several areas of disagreement that would not only separate us from Adventists, but would separate us from other evangelicals as well (for instance, their view of salvation, as one might expect, is strongly Arminian). We must concentrate our attention, therefore, on the Adventist distinctives. These teachings separate the church from the mainstream of evangelical Christianity and also provide the information we need to decide whether or not the classification of this group as a cult is legitimate (you have undoubtedly noticed that my language in the lessons thus far has given away my conclusion on this question). The material in this lesson will provide a good opportunity, not only to familiarize your class with the teachings of Adventism, but also to remind them of the distinctives that set Reformed Baptists apart from other evangelical believers. Be sure to find out before the class starts if any of your students know any Adventists personally. Such connections always help establish the relevance of the study in which we are engaged.

Lesson Procedure

We will again go through a typical systematic theology outline in studying the beliefs of the Adventists. It would be helpful to start the lesson with a brief review of the history studied last week.

1. Adventist Doctrine

A. Scripture

Adventists consider the Bible to be the revealed Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and practice. In other words, their view of Scripture corresponds with our own. The problem occurs when Mrs. White's writings are considered inspired. While no Adventist would claim that Ellen G. White's books are on the same level as Scripture, they do believe that the two harmonize completely. Consequently, her writings serve as a sort of informal second canon, and we again find a set of "spectacles" through which the Bible is interpreted. They also believe that the gift of inspired prophecy continues to function in the Adventist Church today and distinguishes it from all other churches.

B. God

Their doctrine of God is completely orthodox. They affirm the doctrine of the Trinity and uphold the doctrine of creation as strongly as any evangelical. They are notorious foes of the theory of evolution.

C. Christ

Their view of the person of Christ is generally orthodox, though they do believe that it was theoretically possible for Christ to have sinned while He was here on earth. They believe in His full deity and full humanity. In the area of the work of Christ, however, they run into trouble. The difficulties begin with the fact that their understanding of Christ's work on the cross is strongly Arminian. In addition to that, they believe that the redemptive work of Christ was a substitutionary work, but was not finished with His death on the cross. Adventists believe that from the time of His ascension until October 22, 1844, Christ was interceding for sinners in the Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary - a temple in heaven of which the earthly temple was a replica. At that time, He entered into the Holy of Holies to begin the atoning work of cleansing the sanctuary. This cleansing is accomplished through the Investigative Judgment, in which Christ determines which of the dead are worthy of resurrection and which of the living are worthy of translation. This determination is made on the basis of their works. A person's sins are not blotted out until he passes the Investigative Judgment. The final removal of sins will be accomplished by placing them on Satan, the fulfillment of the Scapegoat of the Day of Atonement.

D. Holy Spirit

The Adventist doctrine of the Holy Spirit is again orthodox in relation to His person, but their understanding of His work is again Arminian, since they do not see regeneration as a sovereign work.

E. Man

With regard to the doctrine of man, Adventists hold an orthodox dichotomist position with regard to his nature. The sinfulness of man is typically seen as less debilitating than the doctrine of total depravity would affirm.

F. Salvation

The Adventist view of salvation is typically Arminian, and shares with extreme Arminians the rejection of eternal security. Adventists believe, in conjunction with the teaching concerning the Investigative Judgment, that believers are saved by grace, but kept by works. Adventists believe that the keeping of the Sabbath is a very important factor in passing the Investigative Judgment, and indeed at one time taught that only those who worshiped on Saturday had a chance of doing so.

G. Church

Adventists at one time were dogmatically exclusivist, insisting that only they, who did not bear the Mark of the Beast, could pass the Investigative Judgment and thus enter heaven. Today they admit that non-Adventists also have a chance, though they still see themselves as the 144,000 of Revelation 12:17 and consider their church unique in its possession of the truth.

As far as the sacraments are concerned, Adventists practice believers' baptism by immersion and observe the Lord's Supper quarterly, preceded by a footwashing service.

H. Eschatology

i. Individual Eschatology

Adventists believe two doctrines in this area that are common to many cults. They believe the doctrine of soul sleep, which affirms that there is no consciousness between the time of death and the time of the resurrection (in other words, the intermediate state is one of unconsciousness). They also teach the annihilation of the wicked, which affirms that there is no hell, but rather the wicked simply cease to exist in any way, shape or form.

ii. General Eschatology

Adventists have finally given up date-setting, which unfortunately cannot be said for many of the cults. Their overall eschatological position may be classified as premillennial and posttribulational. There are a few peculiarities associated with this position, however. According to them, all Adventists will be raised just before the Second Coming, along with those who personally put Christ to death in the first century, so they can witness it (Revelation 1:7; 14:13; Daniel 12:2). When Christ returns, the Battle of Armageddon will be fought, after which Satan and his angels will be confined to a desolate earth for a thousand years, then will be annihilated. Meanwhile, the church will reign in heaven with Christ for a thousand years, then live eternally on a renewed earth.

2. Adventist Practice

A. Worship

The observance of the Sabbath continues to be a key area for Adventists. The seminal teaching of Joseph Bates was confirmed and augmented by Mrs. White, who saw a vision in which she saw the tables of the law with the fourth commandment standing out in shining lights, indicating that it was the most important. She stated that the two beasts of Revelation 13 were the papacy and the United States government, the former because of its supposed institution of Sunday worship, the latter because of its

perpetuation through “ungodly” blue laws. Other aspects of Jewish ceremonial law are also observed, including the dietary laws.

B. Morality

Morality, as with the Mormons, is strict. Like the Mormons, they abstain from liquor, tobacco, coffee, and tea, along with unclean foods and worldly practices.

Conclusion

Conclude the class with a discussion of the issue of whether or not the Adventists should be considered a cult, comparing them particularly with the definition and characteristics of a cult that we discussed in the first lesson. Be sure to point out that the most treacherous work of Satan is done, not by enticing people with something far from the truth, but by generating a counterfeit that is close to the truth, but just wrong enough to condemn those who follow it to hell.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE - HISTORY

Lesson Aim

To give students a basic knowledge of the history of the Church of Christ, Scientist, and of the religious environment out of which it came.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:1 - "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days."

Lesson Background

The cult commonly known as Christian Science is perhaps the most peculiar of all the groups we will be studying during this quarter. While it is true in general that people do not join cults because of the coherence and logic of their teachings, this is especially true for Christian Science. Aside from the Eastern mystics, whose worldview is totally unlike that of the Western world, there is no cult so foreign in its conception of reality. By the time we are done these two lessons, most of your students will probably wonder how anyone could join such a ridiculous group.

It is important along these lines to keep in mind the role played by experience in the religious thinking and practice of most people. There are some whom Christ has brought to Himself through a reasoned weighing of alternatives. Most people, however, came to Christ and only later became acquainted with all but the most foundational doctrines of Scripture. With those who are not Christians, the situation is even clearer. Most hold their religious beliefs by tradition, having gotten them from their parents or someone else of significance in their lives. Others operate on the basis of some sort of subjective feelings about the supernatural dimension of reality (or lack thereof). With Christian Science, it is this dimension of experience that is critical for most people. Most of those who are involved in the cult have experienced

some sort of healing as a result of their interaction with cult members. A few others may be attracted by the pseudo-sophisticated metaphysical jargon in which the cult abounds. Consequently, it is important to remind your students that knowing the truth is not enough. One who has no experience of the work of God in his life can easily be deflected into a cult by some overwhelming (and therefore convincing) experience.

Lesson Procedure

Before getting into the content of this lesson, remind your students of what we talked about in the first lesson concerning the reasons people join cults. Emphasize the fact that convincing doctrine was not one of the reasons we included. Note that they should look at the history of Christian Science, which we will be covering today, in the context of the psychological needs that people who join cults are seeking to have met.

1. The environment in which Christian Science developed

Christian Science had its origins a little farther north than the other cults we have studied thus far. It began in New England, principally in Massachusetts. The Second Great Awakening had, as we have seen before, produced much religious excitement in the region. The emotional drain that followed in the wake of this excitement opened the door for all manner of heretics and charlatans. The traveling medicine shows of the old Western movies really did exist, and such a man plays an important role in today's story.

Perhaps more important than the emotional drain left by the Awakening is the emphasis on perfection it generated. People were taught by the preachers of the day that sinless perfection was possible, and that one who sinned was in danger of losing his salvation. It should not surprise us that others soon came along who insisted that faith could not only remove sin, but also its effects - disease and even death. One of those who capitalized on this connection was Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy.

2. Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy (1821-1910)

Mary Baker was born into a strict Calvinist family in New Hampshire in 1821. From birth, she suffered from a spinal condition which left her physically weak and, some have suspected, mentally unstable. At the age of nineteen, she married for the first time. Her husband, George Glover, died six months after the wedding.

After ten years of widowhood, she married Daniel Patterson, an itinerant dentist, in 1853. This marriage was not a happy one. Patterson eventually walked out on her in 1866, and they were divorced in 1873. It was during her marriage to Patterson, however, that events occurred that were to lead to the founding of Christian Science.

The first of these important events occurred in 1862, when she met Phineas P. Quimby, a traveling hypnotist and faith healer. His technique of mental healing impressed Mary a great deal, and she became an ardent follower of this fraud. Though she later denounced him, claiming that he had gotten all of his ideas from her, this appears to have been the beginning of her interest in faith healing.

Four years later, the same year her second husband left her, Mary experienced a life-changing event: she fell on the ice. According to her account, the attending physician diagnosed the fall as fatal and she retired to bed to live out her few remaining days on earth. While she was suffering in her bed, she read her Bible, and one day she was reading Matthew 9:2-8. It suddenly occurred to her that her infirmity was all in

her mind, and that if she truly believed that she was healthy, she would be healthy. She then arose from her bed in perfect health, a new woman in both body and mind. (It should be noted in passing, of course, that the doctor's account of the incident differs significantly from that given by Mary. He not only maintained that he never diagnosed the injury as fatal, but also that her recovery was far from miraculous and instantaneous, instead taking almost a year.)

In 1866, the year of the fateful fall, Quimby died, and Mary soon began to travel around spreading "her" teachings about mental healing. She attracted a considerable following, and in 1875 published the first edition of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Two years later, she was married for the third time, to Asa G. Eddy. Two years after her final marriage, in 1879, the Church of Christ, Scientist was officially incorporated, with Mary Baker Eddy as leader and pastor and Asa G. Eddy as the first Christian Science practitioner (one who is qualified to administer techniques of mental healing). The preparation of more practitioners was made possible in 1881, when Mary founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College in Boston.

The increasing instability of Mrs. Eddy began to show itself around this time. When Asa Eddy died in 1882, Mary proclaimed that he had been "mentally murdered with arsenic." The church was threatened with schism in 1890 when a Christian Scientist by the name of Josephine Woodbury announced that her newly-born child had been the product of virgin conception, and then proceeded to name the child Prince of Peace. Mary avoided the threat to her authority by promptly excommunicating both mother and child. Mary's condition deteriorated rapidly toward the end of her life. She began wearing glasses, was fitted for dentures, and took increasingly large doses of morphine to kill the pain resulting from her spinal condition (the absurdity of this will become apparent next week when we see what this group believes). Finally, in 1910, the inevitable happened - Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy died, after instructing her followers to say that she had been "mentally murdered."

3. Christian Science in the twentieth century

The Church of Christ, Scientist continues to be slavishly devoted to the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* is considered divinely inspired, despite the fact that it underwent major revision at the hands of retired Unitarian pastor J.H. Wiggin between 1885 and 1891 (the revised edition is still no prize, so the original must have been a grammatical, logical, and theological disaster). The church is constitutionally bound to the teachings of Mrs. Eddy, since one of the provisions in the charter of the church is that no doctrine or practice of the church can be changed without the written permission of the founder.

Unlike the Mormons and Adventists, Christian Scientists are not aggressive in spreading their ideas. Most converts come through their healing ministries (their practitioners are covered in some states under health insurance plans), and others through their extensive literature work. The church sponsors Reading Rooms all over the country in which people can come in, sit down, and read from a wide variety of "edifying literature." The church also sponsors the widely-respected *Christian Science Monitor*, a newspaper founded by the church in 1908 that is now published as a weekly magazine. More recently, a venture into cable television was abandoned after years of major financial losses. Because of the relatively passive nature of the church, the vast majority of its constituency continues to be in the Northeastern United States. The church does not publish membership statistics, but financial records show the membership to be in steep decline since World War II.

Conclusion

Close the lesson by warning your students to take this cult seriously. Even though they don't find Christian Scientists knocking at their doors, the cult is an example of a serious danger to the church - the danger of allowing human reason to outweigh the teachings and authority of the Word of God.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE - DOCTRINE

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the fundamental teachings of the Church of Christ, Scientist, and to help them understand the ways in which these doctrines contradict the Scriptures.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:2 - “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy . . .”

Lesson Background

Last week, we studied the origins of Christian Science. It may seem difficult to believe that a group with such a beginning could possibly last for over a hundred years, but rest assured that it will be even more difficult to believe after we finish studying their doctrine.

The most important teaching of the Christian Science church is that neither evil nor matter exists. Thus while the Mormons may be classified as polytheists, Christian Scientists must be categorized as pantheists. It is clear that such pantheism cannot be derived from the Scriptures. It is therefore necessary for Christian Scientists to interpret the Scriptures in a highly mystical fashion, which renders them practically impervious to argument from the Bible. The Word of God, of course, has a power that is able to break down even such barriers as those erected by its “spiritual” interpreters, but students ought to recognize the difficulty of attempting to witness to someone who uses rules of interpretation that differ radically from our own.

The teacher should also be sure to impress upon the students the weakness of experience as a determiner of truth. Those who adhere to Christian Science do so because their own experience of healing has convinced them of its truth. We as Christians have something far more firm than our own subjective experience on which to base our confidence.

Lesson Procedure

Begin by reviewing in summary form the material covered last week. Be sure to warn the students about the absurdity of what they are about to hear and encourage them to have compassion for those who have been deceived by Satan into believing such utter nonsense.

1. The Doctrine of Christian Science

A. Basic Propositions

Christian Science is based on four fundamental propositions that they believe to be self-evident. The obvious truth of these propositions is said to be indicated by the fact that they mean the same whether they are read forward or backward.

- God is All in All.
- God is Good. Good is Mind.
- God, Spirit, being All, nothing is matter.
- Life, God, omnipotent Good, deny death, evil, sin, disease. Disease, sin, evil, death, deny Good, omnipotent God, Life.

It should be obvious that these basic propositions are both pantheistic and monistic. Everything that truly exists is one, and that one is God. Much like the Hindus, Christian Scientists deny the existence of matter and maintain that all reality is one. God is thus impersonal, and ultimately, so is man. Like matter, sin, disease, and death do not exist.

B. Scripture

Mrs. Eddy taught that the Bible is full of errors because of incorrect translation, and therefore needed to be interpreted “metaphysically.” On the other hand, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, which as we noted last week is a literary and theological disaster, is considered to be verbally inspired. (Note that a major contradiction occurs when someone maintains that he knows that matter does not exist because he read it in a book. It might also be interesting for your students if you can get a copy of *Science and Health* and read a few excerpts for them.)

C. God

God is identified with all of reality, and is impersonal. Mrs. Eddy maintained that anyone who believed in the doctrine of the Trinity was a polytheist.

D. Christ

Christian Science teaching about Christ is full of contradictions. To begin with, they adopt the old Gnostic concept of distinguishing between Jesus and Christ. According to Mrs. Eddy, Jesus was a man like us, while Christ is a divine idea. Jesus was fallible (though sin does not exist); he was also the greatest example of the true Christian Science practitioner. Because Christ is a spirit, He cannot be said to have suffered, died, or been raised from the dead.

The primary purpose of Jesus' ministry was to be an example. His death (which did not occur) could not provide cleansing from sin (which does not exist). Each individual (individuality is an illusion, of course) must cleanse his own mind of evil and illusory thoughts.

E. Holy Spirit

If personality is an illusion in general, we should expect that the Holy Spirit is not perceived as a personal being. He is not distinguished from God in any way, but rather is thought of as the means by which God exercises His power.

F. Man

How can there be a meaningful doctrine of man where the personality of man is denied? Man is mind or spirit (these terms seem to be used interchangeably by Mrs. Eddy), and matter and sin are nothing but illusions, along with sickness and death.

G. Salvation

If man is essentially Mind, then it should come as no surprise that salvation is conceived of as essentially a matter of right thinking. Mrs. Eddy taught that salvation involved the realization that sin, disease, and death do not exist (cf. her own experience after her fall on the ice).

H. Church

Christian Scientists are exclusivists. Not only does no other group have the truth, no other group may even legitimately call itself Christian. In the area of church practice, it is almost unnecessary to mention that they do not practice the sacraments.

I. Eschatology

Christian Science denies biblical eschatology in its entirety. Heaven, hell, the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the Last Judgment are all explained away "metaphysically." In fact, Mrs. Eddy taught that Christian Science itself was the Second Coming of Christ.

Two rather unusual contradictions do creep into their teaching in this area, however. They believe in a period of probation after death (what is that?) during which the spirit may grow into truth. Even more paradoxically, they maintain that any who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the truth during this probationary period will be annihilated!

2. The Practice of Christian Science

A. Worship

The worship of the church is very simple, and includes such common practices as the reading of Scripture, the singing of hymns, and prayer. It should be noted that this prayer is not seen as communication with God (who is impersonal), but rather as a means of increased self-awareness (doesn't this amount to the same thing, since Spirit and God are one?). The major peculiarity in the worship is the absence of a sermon. Mrs. Eddy was so zealous for the faithful preservation of her teachings that she permitted no creativity in the worship. Someone who gave his own ideas from the pulpit might contradict her! Consequently, the edification received in the worship service comes from readings, including Scripture, *Science and Health*, and other helpful literature.

B. Morality

Unlike the Mormons and Adventists, Christian Science does not affirm a fundamentalist approach to moral questions. In the first place, such mundane matters are earthly in nature, and thus have little relevance. Secondly, noble living will grow naturally from one who is devoted to the Mind above all. (Ask your students if they think this is a realistic expectation.)

Conclusion

It should at this point be abundantly clear that Christian Science is biblically (I Corinthians 15 devastates the entire system), theologically, and philosophically absurd (if the senses are unreliable, how can we then believe what our senses tell us when we read in a book that the senses are unreliable?). It should also be obvious that it is extremely difficult to speak to a follower of Christian Science on the basis of Scripture.

You should point out to your students that the greatest strength of Christian Science is also its greatest weakness. It may be difficult to convince a person who has been "healed" (and because of the psychosomatic nature of much illness, we should not doubt that such healings actually occur) that Christian Science is not true. But it also should not be very difficult to get a person to acknowledge that his body is real. Christian Scientists, like the rest of us, eat, drink, and sleep. If the body were not real, would these things be necessary? Of course, the greatest argument against Christian Science is an experience that is impossible for them to deny, and that is the simple fact of death.

Conclude your lesson by warning your students about the folly of depending upon experience as the foundation of truth. While you may be totally convinced of the validity of your experience, it is also true that others are just as sure that their quite contradictory experiences are true also.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE DOCTRINE

1. What are some of the contradictions that exist within the teachings of Christian Science? Why do the members of the cult fail to see these contradictions? Why does Christian Science often appeal to intellectuals?
2. In what sense is Christian Science a system of salvation by works?
3. What are the “spectacles” through which the adherents of Christian Science interpret the Scriptures? Why are these “spectacles” so difficult to remove?
4. If you were to meet a follower of Christian Science, how would you attempt to present the Gospel to him or her? Why would it not be a good idea to argue on the basis of your personal testimony concerning the reality of salvation in Christ?

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - HISTORY

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the history of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, better known as the Jehovah's Witnesses, and with the religious background from which the cult developed.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:3 - "... without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good . . ."

Lesson Background

Among all the cults we are studying this quarter, the Jehovah's Witnesses is the group with which your students are most likely to be familiar. The aggressive evangelistic techniques of the cult, with their seemingly omnipresent door-knocking, make them familiar figures to most American teenagers.

Though the Jehovah's Witnesses are the most recent of the nineteenth-century cults covered in this course, the heresy that provides the foundation for their teaching is a very old one indeed. As we will see next week, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ, maintaining instead that He is the first and greatest of God's created beings. This teaching first originated in the early years of the fourth century with a preacher in Alexandria by the name of Arius. He feared that the teaching concerning the Trinity being spread by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, and his later-to-become-famous pupil Athanasius was leading the church into polytheism. His alternative was to see Christ, not as God, but as a lesser supernatural being. Though this teaching was condemned as a heresy by the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople in the fourth century, it continued among various splinter groups over the years (including the Socinians and Unitarians, who took it even further by denying to Christ any supernatural attributes), and was eventually adopted by Charles Taze

Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses (although it is doubtful that he knew much about the history of the teaching he made it his business to spread).

Russell himself gained much of his intellectual stimulation from a group of Seventh-Day Adventists, so it should not surprise us at all if many Adventist teachings show up in one form or another in the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Like the Adventists, Russell capitalized on the enormous interest in the Second Coming of Christ that was current at the end of the nineteenth century (much of it was stirred up by the earlier Adventist excitement, but quite a bit was the result of the numerous speaking tours in America undertaken by the originator of Dispensationalism, John Nelson Darby).

Like Joseph Smith and Phineas P. Quimby, Russell was a blatant charlatan, but like Smith and Quimby he took in many sincere people. Your students should be reminded again this week of the needs that draw people to the cults and that make them such easy prey to the prowling of the devil and his agents.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking members of the class to share any experiences they may have had with Jehovah's Witnesses. Most may not have had any direct contact, but some will probably remember situations where their parents had conversations with Witnesses who came to the door. Then spend a little time giving some of the historical background of the cult that is found briefly outlined in the Lesson Background section. Indicate to the students that the best way of summarizing the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses is in terms of the first four men who served as president of the cult following its inception in 1884.

1. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

The Jehovah's Witnesses themselves trace their history back to Abel, the son of Adam, whom they consider to have been the first Jehovah's Witness on the basis of Hebrews 12:1 (the "cloud of witnesses" refers to chapter 11, and the first witness mentioned in chapter 11 is Abel, who therefore may be considered the first faithful witness of Jehovah, or the first Jehovah's Witness).

The modern founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses was Charles Taze Russell, who was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, into a strict Presbyterian family. He grew up with an almost pathological fear of hell. It was therefore quite a relief to him when he found out while attending an Adventist Bible study that hell did not exist. This encouraging discovery occurred in 1869, when Russell was seventeen. Three years later, at the age of twenty, he began his own Bible study in a house in Pittsburgh. It was out of this Bible study that the cult later to be known as the Jehovah's Witnesses grew.

Russell turned out to be a prolific writer, and his first publication was a small pamphlet called *The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return* (published in 1875 but dated "1872" on the title page so that references to events that occurred between 1872 and 1874 would appear to be prophecy). In this pamphlet, he maintained that Christ was going to return in the year 1874, and that this return would be in secret (the date was later changed to 1914, which continues to be held by Jehovah's Witnesses today). His little band of followers began publishing a magazine in 1879 called *Zion's Watchtower*. The group was officially incorporated in 1884 as the *Zion's Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*. The trademarks of the Witnesses, house-to-house preaching and home Bible studies, have been part of their practice from the very beginning. In the early years, the members of the group did quite a bit of witnessing, and Russell continued to write. His books, such as *Divine Plan of the Ages* and the six-volume *Studies in the Scriptures*, provided the doctrinal foundation upon which the teachings of the cult were built. The headquarters of the group was moved from Pittsburgh to its present location in Brooklyn, New York in 1908.

In his later years, Russell had many personal problems that harmed the reputation of the group to a large extent. In 1899, his wife left him, and the divorce was less than amicable. In fact, the judge who granted the divorce commented that he had never been so pleased to sever a marriage bond, since he couldn't understand how any woman could live with such an arrogant and obnoxious man.

Russell became embroiled in two court cases toward the end of his life that are indicative of the character of the man. In 1913, he was moonlighting by selling Miracle Wheat and Millennial Beans, which allegedly produced a far greater yield per acre than normal seed. A newspaper tested the stuff and found the advertising claims to be false (in fact, the Miracle Wheat was decidedly inferior to normal wheat). Russell promptly sued the paper for libel, but the newspaper story was vindicated and Russell lost the case.

A far more damaging case came up later that year when a pastor in Toronto, Canada named J.J. Ross published a pamphlet denouncing Russell and the Jehovah's Witnesses and accusing the cult of teaching false doctrine based on absurd claims relating to the translation and interpretation of Scripture. Russell again sued, but perjured himself in court when he was called to the stand and asked if he could translate Greek. He maintained that he could, but when handed a Greek New Testament, was unable to read a single word. The case was quickly thrown out of court. Russell died three years later, having asked to be buried in a bedsheet wrapped to resemble a Roman toga, and the cult appeared to be declining fast.

2. Joseph F. Rutherford (1869-1942)

Russell was succeeded as president of the group by Joseph F. Rutherford, Russell's lawyer, who called himself "Judge" despite the lack of formal legal training or judicial experience. It was his legal ability that saved the cult from extinction. He got off to a poor start when he spent nine months in prison for protesting the involvement of the United States in World War I and encouraging young men to evade the draft, but he soon got the cult back on its feet. He wrote even more extensively than Russell, and during his presidency won over two hundred court cases that gave the Witnesses the right to go door to door in municipality after municipality and state after state. These victories led to enormous numerical growth for the cult.

Rutherford's other major contribution was to sever the cult from the negative reputation generated by Russell. One way in which he did this was to change the name of the group. Needless to say, "Watchtower Bible and Tract Society" is quite a mouthful, so many had developed the habit of referring to the group as "Russellites." This obviously did not enhance the reputation of the group. Rutherford therefore changed the name of the group to Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

3. Nathan H. Knorr (1905-1977)

When Rutherford died in 1942, he was succeeded by Nathan H. Knorr, who did much to make the cult what it is today during his twenty-five-year presidency. Knorr was largely responsible for standardizing the doctrine and practice of the group. He produced instructional materials from the Brooklyn headquarters (anonymously, to avoid the stigma of a personality cult that had surrounded the presidencies of Russell and Rutherford) that could be used to train Jehovah's Witnesses in the teachings of the group, and also to prepare them for effective door-to-door witnessing. The Jehovah's Witnesses who come to your door have therefore been through extensive courses in which they have learned how to respond to just about any kind of traditional argument against their teachings that might be raised from the Scriptures. We will see next week how their preparation for traditional arguments makes witnessing to them especially difficult.

Knorr was also largely responsible for the preparation of *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1955, revised 1961), the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible, which contains many of their

doctrinal distinctives. Though Knorr and his chief associate, Frederick Franz, knew little Greek and no Hebrew and had no formal training in Bible translation, they were responsible for the bulk of the work.

4. Frederick W. Franz (1895-1992)

When Knorr died in 1977, Franz became the president despite the fact that he was already in his eighties. He died at the age of 97, and was not what one would call an aggressive leader for the cult. His presidency saw a significant number of defections in the middle levels of cult leadership (including Franz's own son), many of them associated with the cult's ineffective response to the failure of the Franz's earlier prediction that the Battle of Armageddon would occur in 1975, ending the history of the world with a nuclear holocaust (see next week's lesson).

Jehovah's Witnesses today have extensive literature and missionary efforts throughout the world (they claim a worldwide membership of 8.2 million), and often are the objects of severe persecution, largely because of their strong anti-government stand (more next week). Such a doctrine may be tolerated in the United States, but words uttered against the government can have dire consequences in many Third World countries. Jehovah's Witnesses glory in this persecution, however, insisting that it is for the sake of righteousness.

Conclusion

Close the lesson by reminding your students that many nominal Christians are the targets of groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose knowledge of the Scriptures can be very impressive to one whose own understanding of the Bible is minimal. The only way to combat error is with a firm grasp of the truth.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - DOCTRINE

Lesson Aim

To present to students the basic teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and in so doing prepare them to witness to those they may encounter.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:4 - “. . . treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God . . .”

Lesson Background

We have already made note of three sources that contributed to the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses. These three sources are fourth-century Arianism, which provided the Jehovah's Witness doctrine of the person of Christ; Adventism, which, as we shall see, contributed the doctrines of individual eschatology such as soul sleep and the annihilation of the wicked; and the general millennial enthusiasm of the day, which certainly encouraged some of the excesses of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the area of future things. Other distinctives will become apparent as we move through this week's material.

In addition to surveying the doctrine and practice of the Jehovah's Witnesses, we want to spend some time this week talking about how to deal with them when they come knocking on the door. This occurs so frequently that we simply cannot afford to ignore the subject, especially considering the difficulty of such encounters and the excellent preparation that characterizes most Jehovah's Witnesses and that makes them so persuasive. Do not forget to point out to the non-Christians in your group that the most fertile ground for

the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses has always been those who are nominal Christians - people who profess to belong to Christ, but whose lives show no real concern for spiritual things.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the session today by reminding your students about the three factors that exerted an influence on the formation of the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses and tie that in with a brief review of the history covered last week. Then indicate that we will go through our usual procedure today in surveying the beliefs and practices of the cult.

1. Jehovah's Witness Doctrine

A. Scripture

Jehovah's Witnesses would claim to hold the same doctrine of Scripture accepted by evangelical Christians. They believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only authority in matters of faith and practice. In reality, though, their use of Scripture is highly selective. Apart from their memorized proof texts, which give Jehovah's Witnesses the appearance of knowing the Bible exceptionally well, they really know little of Scripture. In effect, the literature produced by the headquarters in Brooklyn, which is the main source of the interpretation of Scripture for the members of the cult, becomes the spectacles through which the Word of God is read. Unlike Mormons and Adventists, however, Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the continuation of divine revelation through the church's leadership.

B. God

As we have already noted, Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians, holding strictly to a monotheistic view of God that excludes any consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity. They worship only Jehovah, whose witnesses they claim to be, and they erroneously reserve that divine name for God the Father alone.

C. Christ

With regard to the person of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses see Him as the first and greatest created being (Colossians 1:15; Revelation 3:14). In fact, they claim that He is the same as Michael the archangel. They say that although Jesus lived a sinless life, He is inferior to Jehovah (John 14:28; 20:17; I Corinthians 11:3; 15:28).

The work of Christ is seen as a ransom that delivered all people from the sin of Adam and gave them the opportunity to earn salvation by obedience to Jehovah. The price of the ransom payment was Christ's body, which was paid to Satan. Since the ransom price could not justly be reclaimed, the resurrection and ascension of Christ are thought to be spiritual only (I Peter 3:18), as is His return (Matthew 24:3-51), which they believe occurred in 1914.

D. Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, in conjunction with their denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, is conceived of as an impersonal force (Matthew 3:11).

E. Man

Man is evil as a result of Adam's sin, but that sin has been removed by the death of Christ. This leaves man free to choose to serve Jehovah or to persist in willful disobedience.

F. Salvation

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, there are four necessary components of salvation. These include repentance, faith in the sacrifice of Christ, baptism by immersion, and works of obedience. The last are not only necessary in order for a person to keep his salvation, but also distinguish between two groups of believers, the "little flock" and the "other sheep."

G. Church

Jehovah's Witnesses are definitely exclusivists. They view themselves as the only true church, the 144,000 of Revelation. In fact, denominational disunity is used by the Jehovah's Witnesses as proof that Christians cannot possibly have the truth.

The true church is divided into two parts, as noted above. The "little flock" is made up of exactly 144,000 people who are described in Scripture as the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, saints, etc. These special few will spend eternity in the presence of God in heaven. The "other sheep," on the other hand, who fail to measure up because of a lesser degree of faithfulness and effort, are destined to spend eternity in an earthly paradise.

H. Eschatology

i. Individual

As is true with the Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses believe in soul sleep (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10) and the annihilation of the wicked. The souls of believers were raised when Christ returned in 1914, and all believers who die since that time go directly into the presence of Christ - "in the spirit," of course.

During the Millennium, which will begin after the Battle of Armageddon, the wicked dead will be raised and given a second chance for salvation. Those who refuse will be annihilated. As with Adventists, there is no hell. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the word "hell" in Scripture refers to the grave, not to an eternal place of torment.

ii. General

Christ returned secretly in 1914, and in 1918 began the work of cleansing the Heavenly Sanctuary (where have we heard that before?). During the present age, the last of the 144,000 are being gathered. This age will end with increasing persecution of Jehovah's faithful Witnesses, culminating in a worldwide attempt to wipe them out. Jehovah will then initiate the Battle of Armageddon, a nuclear holocaust in which all but the Jehovah's Witnesses will be destroyed (as we noted earlier, this was supposed to occur in 1975, but never materialized; the date 1975 was chosen since it was thought to mark the end of 6000 years of human history; since God created the world in six days and rested the seventh, and since a day with the Lord is as a thousand years, human history must last 6000 years, to be followed by a thousand-year millennial rest). As noted

earlier, the “little flock” will spend eternity in heaven, while the “other sheep” will remain forever in an earthly paradise.

2. Jehovah’s Witness Practice

A. Worship

Jehovah’s Witnesses meet for worship in buildings called Kingdom Halls. All adult males are ordained ministers, as is the case for the most part with the Mormons. Each congregation has a presiding minister, who oversees the flock, along with an assistant minister and a group of “servants,” each in charge of a different area of congregational life (Bible study, literature distribution, door-to-door witnessing, finances, etc.). Congregations generally meet three times during the week for Bible study, going over literature from headquarters, practicing witnessing techniques, seminars, and special speakers. The Sunday meeting, open to the public, is usually held in the afternoon (Jehovah’s Witnesses have found Sunday morning to be the best time of the week for door-to-door canvassing, since those disenchanted with the church are likely to be home, while they don’t have to waste their time on zealots who refuse to listen to the truth). Service requirements are taken very seriously by Jehovah’s Witnesses, and members are constantly being encouraged to reach quotas in witnessing and literature distribution, with the possibility of making it into the “little flock” if they work hard enough and the threat of annihilation if they let down on the job.

B. Morality

Jehovah’s Witnesses are extremely strict, sharing many of the same taboos held by most fundamentalist churches.

C. Distinctive Practices

Some of the following peculiar practices characterize the Jehovah’s Witnesses:

- They believe all governments are of Satan. In connection with this, they refuse to take oaths in court, salute the flag, or participate in the military. In fact, they are complete pacifists. As we saw earlier, it is this attitude that has caused much of the persecution they have experienced in the countries of the Third World. Their pacifism is also the reason why they consider all male members to be ministers; this at the time made them exempt from the military draft.
- They refuse blood transfusions, insisting that a person’s soul is in his blood, so that someone who receives a transfusion is both “eating blood” and taking the soul of another person into his body.
- They refuse to acknowledge the birth of Christ as the focal point of history. Instead of referring to dates in history as B.C. or A.D., they use C.E. (Common Era) and B.C.E. (a practice that is also common among Jews and secularists).
- Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the cross as a legitimate religious symbol, maintaining that Jesus did not die on a cross, but rather on a “torture stake.” They consider it barbaric to cherish as a religious symbol an instrument of torture and murder. In fact, they reject all religious symbols as idolatrous, and refuse to celebrate holidays of any kind, claiming that all, whether secular or “religious,” are of pagan origin (this includes Christmas, Easter, birthdays, patriotic holidays, Thanksgiving, etc.).

3. Witnessing to the Jehovah's Witness

As we have already seen, Jehovah's Witnesses are extremely difficult to witness to because they have answers for just about every question a person might ask. The legitimacy of these answers is really beside the point, since they are obviously convincing to the speaker, if not to the listener. Because of this built-in wall, several things must be kept in mind when speaking to a Jehovah's Witness.

A. Control the conversation

Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to be aggressive, so you must be equally aggressive if you hope to get through to one. This aggressiveness shows up in several ways. First of all, the Jehovah's Witness will try to control the topic of conversation. Objections will be countered rather than answered. A verse that makes a telling point against one of their teachings will rarely be explained; instead, the Witness will turn to another verse that seems to support his point. If things get too uncomfortable, expect the Witness to change the subject, usually into some area of esoterica such as the 144,000. Do not allow the conversation to get sidetracked into trivia (see Jesus' treatment of the woman at the well in John 4).

B. Emphasize the important issues

With a Jehovah's Witness, two issues are critical. The first and foremost is the deity of Christ. All other Witness aberrations are minor compared to this one. Since they are trained to respond to all the traditional arguments in this area, a fruitful approach is often to attempt to prove that Jesus Christ is Jehovah. This can be done by using various verses where a New Testament writer quotes the Old Testament, and in doing so uses a statement that speaks of Jehovah to refer to Christ (Romans 10:13 quoting Joel 2:32 is one of at least ten examples; here the Lord (Jehovah) upon whom men are to call for salvation is said by Paul to be Christ).

The other key issue is the assurance of salvation. Jehovah's Witnesses, of course, deny this doctrine, maintaining that no one can be sure if he is saved, but can only hope that this is the case. The promise of heaven is a remote one to most Jehovah's Witnesses, who have little legitimate hope of being part of the "little flock." Consequently, this is an area in which the Christian can show real personal concern. Aside from pointing out the biblical truth that a person can be confident of his standing in Christ, this is a good opportunity to show love for the Witness as a person. They get a lot of doors slammed in their faces, and a genuine show of personal love and concern can go far. A Christian who knows where he stands with God can present a picture of quiet assurance that can leave a mark on the mind of a thoughtful Jehovah's Witness.

C. Depend on the Holy Spirit

Never get the false idea that a cultist can be won to Christ by clever argumentation. Only the Holy Spirit can convert a person, and prayer is a constant necessity. Never forget that the Spirit is able to use the Word of God in a powerful way to confound the arguments of the "wise."

SCIENTOLOGY

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the history and teachings of the Church of Scientology and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, and enlighten them as to the dangers of this highly-publicized yet secretive and very dangerous cult.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:5 - “. . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

Lesson Background

One of the most unusual cults plaguing the religious scene in America (and now throughout the world) is the Church of Scientology. We have seen that many cults begin as scams perpetrated by founders seeking power and/or wealth, including the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Over time, however, these have moderated some of their more extreme teachings and practices and have come to be accepted as part of the religious scene, with clear organizational structures and followers who sincerely believe their teachings, however unorthodox they may be. Scientology is an exception to this pattern because, while it clearly began as a scam, it continues to be so today, to the extent that numerous governments throughout the world still refuse to recognize it as a genuine religion and deny it the protections such recognition involves, such as freedom from taxation.

The cult has gained publicity for a number of reasons despite its notorious secrecy. One of these is the fact that it has attracted some famous followers, such as the actors Tom Cruise, John Travolta, and many other denizens of Hollywood (Charles Manson also joined the cult for a time in prison, but I suspect they

don't publicize that one). They also have been very aggressive in pursuing legal action against any they view as enemies, including authors who write negative things about the cult and government agencies that dare to investigate them. While these are the things on the surface of Scientology that most people know, few really know anything about the group's teachings and practices, making it easy for impressionable young people to be drawn into a very dangerous movement. The purpose of this lesson is to make your students aware of some of these lesser-known aspects of the Church of Scientology.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students what they know about Scientology. You will probably find that their knowledge is limited to the names of celebrities who have identified themselves with the movement.

1. The Career of L. Ron Hubbard

Scientology is impossible to understand without knowing something about its founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986). He was born in Nebraska, but grew up in Asia because his father was a career Navy officer. He returned to the U.S. to attend George Washington University, studying Civil Engineering, but dropped out after two years when he failed Physics. His only degree is a Ph.D. purchased from Sequoia University in California, an unaccredited diploma mill. He served in the Navy for five years during World War II and claimed that he left the service crippled, blind, and having been declared dead by doctors on two different occasions. According to his story, however, he emerged completely healed and in perfect health when he discovered the principles of Dianetics.

In the 1930s Hubbard had embarked on a career as a science fiction writer, in which he was highly prolific and moderately successful. The whole direction of his life changed, however, when he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, in 1950. The book, which was a combination of Buddhist teachings and practices, Freudian psychoanalysis, and science fiction from his own imagination (he wrote the 435-page book in three months entirely from his own mind, with no research whatever), soon became a best-seller. He set up Dianetics centers around the country to teach his ideas, but most of these failed, either because they went bankrupt or because of opposition from physicians who considered his do-it-yourself psychoanalysis to damage mental health more than it promoted it.

As a result, in 1952 Hubbard renamed the Dianetics movement, calling it the Church of Scientology, reasoning that, as a religion, he could teach anything he wanted without fear of being held up to scientific scrutiny and at the same time gain tax advantages. This did not solve his problems by any means. In the United States, the group has been investigated by the Food and Drug Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, and the F.B.I. It was banned in Australia, and when Hubbard tried to avoid U.S. scrutiny by moving his headquarters to London, the British refused visas to anyone coming to study Scientology, which they denied was a real religion. Meanwhile, Hubbard was becoming fantastically wealthy, both through the sale of his books (*Dianetics* along with his many science fiction works) and through the outlandish fees charged by the group for their services (see below). For several years he ran the group from an ocean-going yacht that stayed in international waters. He finally went into seclusion in California, where no one heard from him for more than five years until his death in 1986.

2. The Teachings of Scientology

The “Church” that is not really a church lacks formal doctrine, but a few comments can be made about their teachings in relationship to our categories of systematic theology.

A. Scripture

Unlike the other cults we’ve studied this quarter, Scientology makes no attempt to identify with Christianity, so one should not be surprised that they make little if any reference to the Bible. One book published by the group, *Scientology and the Bible*, arranges quotations from Hubbard’s writings and verses from the Bible in parallel columns, allegedly showing points of contact between the two, but the verses cited from Scripture have nothing to do with the bizarre ideas presented by the science fiction writer.

B. God

While some Scientologists are willing to acknowledge that God might exist, He has nothing to do with the religion. It is entirely man-centered, requiring people to look within themselves for the answers to life’s problems (with the help of “counselors” provided by the Church of Scientology for a price, of course).

C. Christ

Scientology teaches that the legend of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection was planted in the minds of susceptible “pre-clears” millions of years ago by hostile aliens. Jesus, like Buddha, was slightly higher than “clear” status, far below the higher levels of standing available to cult members.

D. Man

Man is essentially good, and the whole idea of sin is anathema to Scientologists. People’s basic problem is the existence of “engrams,” memories and experiences from the past (even from past lives) that make happiness impossible and must therefore be purged.

Human beings are made up of four parts - a “thetan” (the equivalent of the soul or spirit and is reincarnated over and over again; in fact, the thetans created the universe but became imprisoned in their own creation and need to be released so as to realize its enormous powers), a physical body indwelt by the thetan, an analytic mind, and a subconscious “reactive mind” that generates engrams, which are the sources of unhappiness and neuroses.

E. Salvation

Happiness is achieved by purging the engrams. One who first joins the cult is “pre-clear” and must go through an extensive process of “auditing” in order to get rid of the engrams. This involves long sessions with a “counselor” during which the initiate is asked personal questions about his life and his past while hooked up to an “e-meter,” which is nothing more than a simplified lie detector - a galvanometer that measure changes in the conductivity of the skin. These lengthy and expensive sessions (as much as \$1000 per hour) ultimately lead to “clear” status, where the engrams have been removed. This is not the end of the process, however; one who is “clear” is now open to new attacks and must fortify himself through much more extensive and expensive courses equipping him as an “Operating Thetan.” During this stage one learns the deepest secrets of Scientology, including their mythology about the origin of the universe. You also learn

how to release “body thetans” (demons?) that live inside you without your knowledge and bring about disastrous consequences. During the development of Scientology, Hubbard continued to add more and more steps to the process in order to extract greater sums of money from his followers (which was his stated goal).

F. Church

Since the switch to a church from a self-help movement, Scientologists have held church services led by robed ministers, but these, like those of Christian Science, consist largely of readings from the writings of the founder.

G. Eschatology

i. Individual

The ultimate goal of Scientology is complete self-knowledge. This religion, described by one critic as “technological Buddhism,” has no clear idea of individual immortality and continues to believe in reincarnation.

ii. General

On a larger scale, the goal of Scientology is the complete remaking of society - they want to conquer the world. They teach that only Scientology can save man from utter destruction, and therefore they attempt to insert themselves into every aspect of contemporary culture, planting unidentified adherents of the cult into large organizations of all kinds in an attempt to subvert or take over those organizations.

3. The Dangers of Scientology

The dangers of Scientology are many and varied. The following will give a brief idea of the insidious nature of this cult:

- **Ethics** - Like Muslims, Scientologists define morality in terms of what is good for the organization. The end thus justifies the means, leading Scientologists to justify damaging those they perceive as enemies by all means fair or foul (what Hubbard called the doctrine of Fair Game). A few Scientologists have spent time in prison for exercising these tactics, though a large percentage have gone unpunished because of the cult’s heavy dependence on public relations and legal wrangling.
- **Mind Control** - The auditing process opens a person up to psychological manipulation, and sharing one’s deepest secrets provides weapons that the cult can later use to control followers.
- **Lawsuits** - The favorite tactic of the Church of Scientology to silence their critics is filing lawsuits against them. The goal here is not necessarily to win, but to harass and sometimes exhaust the resources of the people or organizations being sued.
- **Front Organizations** - Scientology sponsors many groups that appear to be directed toward community service but are really gateways into the cult for the naive and vulnerable. These groups are never identified as being affiliated with Scientology.

- **Illegal Activities** - Deceptive business practices, money laundering, medical malpractice, and even burglarizing the offices of government agencies are only a few of the illegal activities for which the church has been cited.
- **Market Manipulation** - Do you wonder why the books of Scientologists always seem to show up on best-seller lists? The church has a practice of buying tens of thousands of copies of their own books from mainstream book outlets in order to move the titles up the lists and generate positive publicity for the organization.
- **Financial Manipulation** - The treatments offered by Scientology are very expensive, and become more so the further one is drawn into the cult. Many have been driven to financial ruin by the manipulations of cult leaders. What kind of church charges for its services? Scientology is nothing but a financial scam masquerading as a religious organization.
- **Isolation** - Like many other cults over the years, Scientology seeks to isolate initiates from their families in order to control them more fully.
- **The Cult of Celebrity** - Scientology does a great deal of public relations work among the rich and famous, particularly in the entertainment industry. Celebrities are given special treatment in posh “celebrity centers” and are not subject to the same manipulative tactics as normal initiates, thus enabling them to give glowing reports of their experiences within the organization.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

SCIENTOLOGY

1. In what ways are the science fiction roots of Scientology evident in its teachings?
2. Why is Scientology more a business than a church and more a scam than a business?
3. In the long run, how does Scientology seek to take advantage of the safeguards of a democratic society in order to control and manipulate that society?
4. How is Scientology like Freudian psychoanalysis? How is it like Buddhism?
5. How does the name of the cult give a false impression of what it is all about? Why is it not really “scientific” at all?
6. Why is Scientology a dangerous organization, both to the church and to society at large?

UNIFICATION CHURCH

Lesson Aim

To make students aware of some of the background and teachings of one of the most controversial cults in recent years, the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:6 - “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins, and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires . . .”

Lesson Background

Few cults to come on the scene have been initially as frightening to people as the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, otherwise known as the Unification Church, whose followers are often referred to as Moonies. This group has, perhaps in some ways justifiably, generated the same kind of paranoia in the general population that was stirred up by the Jehovah’s Witnesses at the beginning of the century. To the aggressiveness that caused many to fear the Witnesses, the Moonies have added persistent rumors of brainwashing. Like the other cults we have studied, the Unification Church tends to prey upon the insecure. Though they have been striving hard in recent years for a measure of respectability, the treatment accorded Sun Myung Moon in his trial on tax evasion charges shows that the cult is still feared in many circles.

The cult started in Korea in the context of Pentecostalism, but the founder tended to be eclectic in his teachings, borrowing from various other non-Christian groups. Moon’s church is also in some ways

similar to the groups we will be considering next week in that its East Asian origin gives it a certain mixture of Christianity and Eastern religions that is not unlike the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cults.

The main thrust of today's lesson should be based on the seductiveness of Satan. In the same way L. Ron Hubbard was seduced by the love of money and power, Moon seems to be obsessed with the area of sex (he is not unlike Joseph Smith in this respect). Satan is able to distort the truth of God into some incredibly vile lies, for which the Unification Church provides many good examples.

Lesson Procedure

As we did last week, we will try to condense the entire procedure into a single week. The Unification Church should be one that your students find very interesting. It might be a good idea to begin the class by asking them what they know about the Moonies. You will probably find that, while some may have heard of the Moonies, they generally know very little about them.

1. The History of the Unification Church

The founder of the Unification Church is Sun Myung Moon (1920-2012), who was born in what is now North Korea. At the age of sixteen, on an Easter Sunday morning, Moon went out to a hillside alone, where Jesus supposedly appeared to him and commissioned him to be His Second Coming and to finish His work. That vision became the basis for his founding, in 1946, of the Broad Sea Church, which drew its membership largely from the ranks of Korean Pentecostals. In 1948, Moon was excommunicated from the Korean Presbyterian Church. In the years prior to the Korean War, he was imprisoned by the communists several times, although the explanations for the imprisonment differ (they claim it was for bigamy and adultery, he claims it was for anti-communist agitation). He later fled to South Korea.

In 1954, he founded the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity. Though he claims that his church is a legitimate Christian church, both the Korean National Association of Evangelicals and the liberal National Council of Churches have refused to recognize it or grant it membership status. In 1957, *Divine Principle*, a book containing the theological foundation for the teachings of the church, was written by one of Moon's disciples.

The church has been embroiled in controversy almost continually. Moon was a vocal supporter of the Vietnam War, and of Richard Nixon during the days of the Watergate scandal. He has grown rich, largely through the efforts of a fleet of young volunteer workers who sell flowers and trinkets on street corners and in airports sixteen hours a day (although to be fair, it must be noted that Moon is independently wealthy, though the cult has not made him any poorer). The cult has also generated fear because of its habit of working through various "front" organizations, both of a charitable and a profitable nature, which are not readily identified with the church (in one particularly embarrassing incident, noted fundamentalist Bob Jones III actually agreed to serve on the advisory board of one such group before realizing that it was affiliated with the Unification Church). The church has also been the subject of frequent accusations that it has ties to the Korean C.I.A., though Moon denied it.

Moon's personal life has also been a matter of controversy. In 1960, when he married his fourth wife, he called the event "The Marriage of the Lamb," insisting that it fulfilled the prophecy of Revelation 19. His finances were also a source of frequent accusations. He purchased extensive property holdings in the United States and elsewhere, including a large estate in Tarrytown, N.Y., which was converted into a seminary for the church. Moon later spent about a year in prison following a 1982 conviction for income tax evasion. In 2004, he was crowned King of Peace, complete with a crown and royal robes, in Washington,

D.C. He died in 2012 in South Korea. Though Moon claimed a following worldwide of over ten million, the actual membership core of the group probably numbers no more than twenty thousand today.

2. The Doctrine of the Unification Church

A. Scripture

According to Moon, the Bible has never been properly understood. The code to unlock scriptural mysticism was given to Moon in his visions. He endorses visions, seances, and other occult phenomena.

B. God

Moon is essentially a pantheist, as one would expect with his Eastern religious background. He sees the universe as the external form of the essence of God. Naturally enough, he denies the doctrine of the Trinity.

C. Christ

Moon believes that Christ was a perfect man, but not God. He came to the earth to accomplish redemption, but was killed before He was able to finish this work. He was supposed to accomplish the physical redemption of the race by marrying and producing perfect children (we will see later how this ties in with other doctrines of the church). He did accomplish spiritual redemption, but this is incomplete apart from its physical counterpart. Moonies also deny the resurrection of Christ from the dead, at least in bodily form.

D. Holy Spirit

This is a different one - the Holy Spirit is seen as the feminine counterpart of Christ in the work of spiritual redemption.

E. Man

Man was created male and female to harmonize with the essential duality of the universe (similar to yin-yang concept of Eastern philosophy). The original Trinity was God-man-woman, which was destroyed by the Fall and must be reconstituted. The Fall came about when Eve was seduced by Satan, and she then passed her impurity on to Adam in the same way. Man's nature is essentially good, though tainted. He is in need of purification, not forgiveness.

F. Salvation

Moon teaches that there are two basic aspects to salvation, purification and indemnity. Purification involves the undoing of the effects of the Fall and is accomplished through sexual intercourse with a perfect person (this is why it was so important for Jesus to marry and produce perfect offspring). Obviously, this sort of teaching could get Moon in a lot of trouble, so the purification is now seen as symbolic, and is at the heart of the mass marriages performed personally by Moon. (One might legitimately ask, however, if an impure person is purified through intercourse with a pure person, why was not Eve purified by Adam, rather than him being polluted by her? In fact, why was not Satan purified by Eve originally?)

The matter of indemnity involves the payment for sins. A person may be pure through the purification ritual, but until Satan has been paid off with sacrifice, he still has a claim on the person. This sacrifice consists of voluntary service for the church, and is the basis for the flower-pushing in which so many Moonies are engaged.

G. Church

The Unification Church is both exclusive and inclusive. They believe that they alone have the truth and that they are the only true church, but they also insist that all will eventually become part of their group, thus the belief that they are the instrument for the Unification of World Christianity.

H. Eschatology

Moon claimed, though not directly, to be the Second Coming of Christ. He came to complete the work of redemption left unfinished by Christ by starting the perfect race, which will ultimately bring about a heaven on earth. Eternity is viewed as some rather vague mystical union with the Godhead, resembling in some ways the Buddhist idea of Nirvana.

3. The Practice of the Unification Church

The following distinctive practices characterize the Unification Church:

Unlike some of the other groups we have studied, the Moonies think involvement in government is very important. Satan manifests himself in communism, therefore communism must be fought at all costs. Many of the Moonie front organizations are anti-communist in nature. Moon himself was said in the past to have rather grandiose political ambitions (like Joseph Smith?), but nothing ever came of this, though the group has frequently sought political and cultural influence, such as through their purchase of the *Washington Times*.

On moral issues, the Unification Church tends to be rather strict. Alcoholic beverages, drugs, and illicit sex are prohibited (despite Moon's own reputation in this area), while smoking is allowed to a limited extent. The lifestyle of the Moonies tends to be very frugal, with the core members usually living in communes in cities or on farms, while Moon himself lives opulently.

Marriage obviously plays an important role in Unification Church teaching. At one time only marriages performed by Moon were recognized. Married couples who join the cult must abstain from relations for seven months, then be remarried by an official of the church. Marriages within the cult were once arranged by Moon himself, resulting in situations where people who married not only usually did not know one another, but often were from different countries and did not even speak the same language.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

UNIFICATION CHURCH

1. What is the desperate need that drove young people to slave for sixteen hours a day to make money for a rich Korean who claimed to be the Second Coming of Christ?
2. Moon is not the first cult leader we have seen who seemed to have been obsessed with sex. How does that preoccupation manifest itself in the teachings of the group? Why does the obsession with sex by the founder produce what might be considered “puritanical” practice among the followers?
3. What aspects of the teaching of the Unification Church are drawn from the religions of the East?
4. Why did people in the late twentieth century fear the Unification Church more than almost any other cult?

EASTERN MYSTICS

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the rudiments of some of the mystical cults with their roots in Eastern religions.

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:7 - “. . . always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth.”

Lesson Background

Almost all of the cults we have examined so far have been derived from Christianity. Today we will look at several cults with their roots in Eastern religions. Such roots make these cults very different from what we are used to and render their doctrine very difficult to classify. As a result, we will look at these groups in a much more general way, both in terms of their histories and their teachings. Any detailed understanding of what is taught by these cults requires an understanding of the religions from which they have come.

Of the groups we will be looking at today, probably the most prominent are the Hare Krishna cult and the proponents of Transcendental Meditation, which are part of the broader New Age movement. The major thing to keep in mind with these groups is that they offer a path to God that leads nowhere but to the human mind.

Lesson Procedure

As we noted at the beginning of the course, Christianity is not the only religion to have spawned cults. Though almost all of the cults we have examined so far have been derived from Christianity, there are many cults that have their origins in the other major religions of the world. This week, we will be looking briefly at six such cults that in one way or another have made some impact on the religious scene in America over the last two generations.

The popularity of the mystical guru cults in America can probably be traced back to 1967. In that year, the most popular musical group of the time, the Beatles, traveled to India to sit at the feet of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation. The popularity of the Beatles was such that many young people were soon involved in various forms of Eastern mysticism. The entire tone of the popular culture of the sixties was one of rebellion against authority, either in the form of protest or of “dropping out.” The latter could be accomplished by drugs or by the mystical “trips” offered by the Eastern gurus. In the more pragmatic cultural climate of the eighties, the guru cults were far less popular, but have enjoyed a resurgence in connection with the New Age Movement in recent years.

In order to get some idea of the variety that exists among the mystical cults, we will briefly examine six such groups today. These six will include four derived from Hinduism and one each derived from Buddhism and Islam.

1. Hare Krishna

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in 1966 by Swami Prabhupada Bhaktivedanta (1896-1977), a member of the Chaitanya Order (a sect of Hinduism that follows the teachings of Chaitanya, a sixteenth-century saint thought by his followers to be an incarnation of the god Vishnu). The swami (the word means “monk”) was born in Calcutta, earned degrees in English, philosophy, and economics, and managed a large chemical plant for ten years before becoming a monk. ISKCON was founded in New York City, and immediately gained popularity among the hippies in Greenwich Village. Later, Beatle George Harrison’s conversion to the cult made a major impression on many.

The teachings of the cult, as would be expected, have much in common with Hinduism. Like most Eastern religions, it is inclusive, believing that all religious practices are effective if done sincerely, yet maintaining that the asceticism and meditation advocated by their group is the best way to find inner peace and union with the one reality. One thing that sets Hare Krishnas apart from most of their Hindu brethren is their aggressive evangelistic techniques. Though these often amount to little more than standing around in saffron robes and shaved heads and badgering people for contributions in airports or selling copies of their magazine, *Back to Godhead* (much like the Moonies), they have become a very visible part of many American cities.

2. Transcendental Meditation

The International Meditation Society was founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008) in 1959. Born in India, he graduated from Allahabad University in 1942 with a degree in physics and went to work in a factory. After World War II, he went into seclusion in the Himalayas, where he studied and meditated with a Hindu monk. When he reappeared in 1959, he found little acceptance in India, so he traveled to London, where he did no better. The acceptance of his teachings by the Beatles in 1967 turned the tide, and he soon found himself being interviewed for magazines and appearing on television talk shows. In 1974,

Maharishi International University was founded in Fairfield, Iowa, to train instructors in Transcendental Meditation.

This cult has adapted better than any other guru cult to the changing culture of America. The Maharishi pushed his ideas in secular, scientific form as a relaxation technique, a way of dealing with stress. In such secular guise, the program has been adopted by corporations, taught in schools, and even been given a grant by the National Institutes of Health! Amazingly enough, all this has not caused the cult to lose its tax-exempt status as a religion.

No one should be deceived into thinking that Transcendental Meditation is not a religion. It shares all the common teachings of Hinduism and includes an initiation ceremony that involves offering incense to Hindu deities. The heart of the practice of TM is the chanting of a mantra, a Sanskrit monosyllable that is supposedly unique to each individual. Repeated chanting allegedly clears the mind, bringing relaxation and a release from tension and stress. The “modest” claims of the Maharishi included the expectation that the world can be freed from all war, crime, injustice, and spiritual unrest if only everyone would practice Transcendental Meditation. Perhaps the most dangerous thing about TM, and probably the root of its popularity, is that it makes absolutely no ethical demands of its followers. Thus it offers the best of both worlds - you not only can keep sinning, but the cult will help you feel good about it! Like much of modern psychology, TM tells its followers that they have within themselves all the resources they need for complete fulfillment in life if they only learn to tap those resources through meditation.

3. Divine Light Mission

An example of a group that did not successfully make the transition out of the hippie era is the Divine Light Mission. A comparative late-comer among guru cults, the Divine Light Mission came to the United States in 1971. It featured a chubby adolescent guru named Maharaj Ji (b.1957), who had claimed at age eight to be the Perfect Master, an avatar (incarnation) of the Hindu god Vishnu. He was able to gather several thousand followers, resulting in considerable profit to himself.

The teachings of the cult, in addition to the basics of Hinduism, focus largely on the person of the Perfect Master. There can only be one Perfect Master at any given time, and past ones included Krishna, Jesus, and Maharaj Ji's father. The greatest blessings to be received from the religion come from *darshan*, which is the practice of basking in the presence of the Perfect Master. This is said to bring physical healing, inner knowledge, and even the ability to hear celestial music that can be heard only by initiates.

Very little is heard of this group today. I suspect that may have something to do with the fact that the Perfect Master is now almost sixty and has been spending his time enjoying the millions he was given by his followers in the early seventies.

4. Rajneesh

One of the oriental cults to dominate the news in the last generation was the Rajneesh cult, the followers of Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990). This eclectic cult combines teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism with pop psychology and free sex. The group first gained prominence in the United States in 1981 when they set up a commune in Antelope, Oregon. The commune soon grew to such a size that it was considered a political threat, since its inhabitants outnumbered the locals. The Rajneeshees wanted to use local elections to take over the town council and rename the town Rajneeshpuram. Needless to say, the inhabitants of Antelope were not pleased by this prospect, especially when the population of the commune swelled by means of the “charitable outreach” exercised by the Rajneeshees in bringing street people to Rajneeshpuram from cities all over the country at the cult's expense. The scare ended late in 1985

when Rajneesh himself was arrested, convicted of immigration fraud (bringing illegal aliens into the country under false pretenses), and deported. The commune was later sold, along with Rajneesh's personal collection of 84 Rolls Royces. Not surprisingly, the wayward guru had difficulty finding a country willing to take him in after his expulsion from the United States. He later returned to India, where he died.

5. Zen Buddhism

This offshoot of Buddhism came to the United States by way of Japan and first became popular on the West Coast. It gained a following in the drug and dropout culture of California and has moved easily into the self-absorbed New Age consciousness. Like traditional Buddhism, Zen worships no god and has no holy writings. It is concerned with self-awareness, which is to be attained through meditation on koans, which are paradoxes such as, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The goal is enlightenment, and the religion has no concern for morality or service to others at all. It is perhaps the most self-centered of all cults, and because it has no doctrine to speak of, also perhaps the most difficult to understand.

6. Baha'i

The last cult we will look at today is an offshoot of Islam. This cult derives its teachings from an old Islamic tradition concerning the Twelve Imams, descendants of Mohammed, the last of whom supposedly disappeared into a well in 940 and continues to live in some far country. Until his return, his will is revealed to the world through men called Babs, or "gates."

In 1844, a young Persian named Mirza Ali Muhammad (1819-1850) declared himself to be the Bab, and proclaimed that the Manifestation (the twelfth Imam) was soon to appear. He attracted many followers, but was executed by the Persian government as a rabble-rouser. Several of his followers immediately claimed to be the Manifestation. One of them, Mirza Husain Ali (1817-1892), took the name Baha U'llah ("the glory of God") and proceeded to eliminate his rivals one by one. He was exiled to Palestine by the Persian government, but before his death he wrote down his voluminous revelations for the benefit of mankind. After his death, his son Abbas Effendi took the title Abdul Baha and declared himself to be the infallible interpreter of his father's writings. He attempted to spread his father's teachings around the world, but he had very limited success until he came to the United States in 1912. There he laid the cornerstone for the Baha'i Temple in Wilmette, Illinois. After his death in 1921, he was succeeded as leader of the movement by his eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi.

Baha'i was another cult that gained popularity during the rebellious days of the 1960s. It is an inclusive cult, claiming to be the purification and completion of all religions. As one might suspect, its doctrine is a bit on the vague side. They believe there is only one God who has many manifestations (including all founders of major religions), and only one true religion, of which all major religions are corruptions. Evil does not exist, and all souls will ultimately be one. The calendar and days of feasting and fasting are based on the number nineteen. Ethical standards are rather lax, but prejudice of any kind is strictly forbidden. Baha'is have world unity as a major goal, including universal peace, one world government, and a single language for all mankind (most Baha'is favor an invented language called Esperanto, devised by L.L. Zamenhof around the turn of the century). The cult has attracted followers among idealists and minorities on college campuses, and has a significant following in Persia (Iran) today, where Baha'is are severely persecuted.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by asking your students what these different cults have in common. Note that all six are essentially self-absorbed, focusing the attention of followers on themselves, promising fulfillment and happiness, freedom from stress and inner peace. These are not goals to be pursued, but by-products of following Christ. Only a person who loses his life may find it.

RESPONDING TO THE CULTIST

Lesson Aim

To prepare students to respond to the cultists with whom they may have opportunity to converse by “speaking the truth in love.”

Memory Verse

II Timothy 3:8 - “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth - men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.”

Lesson Background

This series on the cults has been undertaken for several purposes. The information presented regarding the histories and doctrines of the various cults was not intended merely to satisfy curiosity, but to be useful to the students in a number of ways. The discussion of the cults hopefully gave the students a clearer understanding of the truth. By seeing how heresy developed and what its characteristics are, students should be better prepared to recognize and hold to the truth.

The course also should help students in any future encounters they may have with followers of the cults we studied, or any other cults, for that matter. Any knowledge gained of the methods used by Satan should help to protect them against his wiles. Most importantly, the knowledge gained should be useful to students in presenting a coherent witness to those who have fallen into the clutches of the cults.

In today’s lesson, we want to bring together the intended benefits of the course. We will spend some time looking at the protective value of the material we have studied, but most of our time will be spent

discussing the peculiar problems associated with witnessing to the cultist. Be sure to emphasize to your students that, though knowledge of a cult's doctrines and biblical responses to those doctrines is important, a genuine love for the cultist will go farther to bring that person to Christ than any form of argument possibly can.

Lesson Procedure

If at all possible, begin today's lesson with a role play. The play should depict a conversation between a cultist and a Christian in which the Christian seeks to witness to the cultist. You might want to play the cultist yourself and have one of your more capable students prepare ahead of time to take the role of the Christian, or perhaps you can arrange for some knowledgeable adult in your church to help you with the demonstration. Choose any one of the cults we have studied; one with which your students are likely to have frequent encounters would be the best choice. The role play should illustrate both the deceitfulness of the cultist's approach and the importance for the Christian of knowing the Bible and showing love at the same time. After the role play, lead the class in a discussion of the principles illustrated by the demonstration.

Move then into a discussion of the benefits of the knowledge gained from the course we have been working through this quarter. Note that knowledge of the cults can yield profit in three areas for the Christian.

1. Knowledge of the Truth

Knowledge of false teaching improves a person's knowledge of the truth. A person is able to understand much more fully what the Bible means when it says Jesus is the Son of God if he knows that it neither means He was the first and greatest of God's creatures, nor that He came into being through sexual relations between God and a human woman. A refinement and greater sophistication in understanding Christian doctrine can be gained by knowing what the Bible does not teach. It is also important to point out that, though we did not have time to do so in this course, a good way to solidify the kind of knowledge of which we are speaking here is to look up specific references in Scripture that demonstrate the validity of the distinctions between truth and error in these various areas of doctrine. These proof-texts may not convince the cultist, but they will certainly enhance the Christian's knowledge of the Word of God and its teachings.

2. Protection Against Error

As the illustration used at the beginning of the course indicated, the best way to train treasury agents to detect counterfeit money is to give them intimate knowledge of the appearance and feel of the real thing. Similarly, a Christian may be best prepared to discern error by gaining a thorough knowledge of the teachings of Scripture.

It never hurts, however, to know how the enemy works. If such knowledge were unimportant, countries would not hire spies to learn the strategy and plans of the opposition. Similarly, Christians may protect themselves effectively against the tactics of Satan by learning something about those tactics, both so they can recognize them when they encounter them and so they will not be caught unaware or by surprise.

It is particularly important for students to be aware of the emotional and need-oriented appeals of the cults. Knowledge of false doctrine may help students recognize that certain groups are not truly Christian, but they may still be susceptible to the appeals of such cults in times of crisis or depression if they

are not prepared for the subtlety of those appeals. Be sure to point out, though, that the best protection against such need-based appeals is involvement in a good church where members are meeting one another's needs through mutual ministry and it is not necessary to turn to some cult group to find love and acceptance.

3. Witness to the Cultist

The greatest value of this course for your Christian students is to help them to witness effectively to members of cults with whom they may come in contact. This is valuable, especially for those who may soon be going away to college, into an environment where diverse ideas are freely exchanged and where Christianity is viewed as merely one religion among many. Witness to the cultist falls into two categories, witness by the Word and witness by love.

A. Witness by the Word

The presentation of the Word of God to a follower of a cult can be a very frustrating experience. The frustration occurs because the cultist either has all the answers to whatever the Christian may say, or else looks at reality on the basis of an entirely different world view (i.e., that of the Eastern mystics). As a result of this, a Christian who seeks to witness to a cultist may feel like he is banging his head against a stone wall.

There is one important thing to remember, however. The Bible is no ordinary book. Because it is the Word of God, it has power that goes far beyond the realm of human persuasion. God is not dependent on human argument to cause His Word to bear fruit in the hearts of unbelievers. The Holy Spirit is able to use the Word of God to break down the defenses of the hardest of blinded sinners. Thus the Christian must ignore the frustration and concentrate on presenting the Word of God faithfully to the cultist.

In the process of presenting the Word of God to the cultist, however, several points should be kept in mind:

- Do not get bogged down in peripheral issues such as eschatology or details of religious practice. Stick to the essentials of the faith, including the sinfulness of man, the need for salvation, and the provision of that salvation through the work of Christ on the cross.
- Do not get defensive. The Word of God is a sword with which to fight for the truth, not a vulnerable spot that requires zealous defense. The cultist is the one who needs to justify his aberrant teachings, not the Christian.
- Be prepared. One cannot effectively deal with a cultist if he does not know what he believes and how to support that belief from Scripture. The cultist will be prepared - you should be no less so.

B. Witness by Love

The greatest witness that a Christian can have to a cultist is through a loving attitude shown to the cultist as a person. Remember, he didn't join the cult because of the persuasiveness of its doctrine. Instead, he accepted the doctrine because he found in the group that taught it the kind of love and acceptance he had been unable to find in the church in which he had been brought up or the world in which he lived. The cultist must therefore be approached as a person in need of Christ, not as a debate opponent. Someone who is able to win a debate with a cultist is rarely able to win the cultist himself. Remember that, though the cult may have met his surface needs, the deep spiritual needs felt by every person remain unmet, and like any

unbeliever, he is trying to fill a void in his life with a god of his own making. This love may be displayed in several practical ways:

- If the cultist comes to your door, receive him politely. The admonition of II John 10-11, which is used by some Christians to support a rude rejection of the cultist, is talking about giving hospitality to false teachers in the church. These false teachers depended for their livelihood on the hospitality of those among whom they traveled, and thus those who showed hospitality to them were in reality supporting them in their false teachings. That is hardly the case with Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons who come knocking on the door today.
- Ask him about his personal spiritual life. Most cultists are so busy engaged in service that they have no devotional life to speak of (of how many Christians might this also be said?). Concern about this area could lead to a fruitful discussion of the nature of true spirituality.
- Focus on the need for salvation and the provision of and assurance of salvation in Christ. The matter of assurance is a particularly crucial one in dealing with most cultists. Except for the Eastern cults, who think everybody is saved, most cults tell their followers that salvation is never a sure thing, thus seeking to motivate them to ever-greater service for the cult. Anyone who believes in salvation by works is likely to lack any real confidence in his standing before God. It is therefore important to emphasize the gracious nature of salvation through Christ, upon whom one may depend utterly to make him right with God.
- Turn the tables on the cultist. If he shows some genuine interest, invite him back for further discussion or offer to set up a Bible study with him on a regular basis. The key is to show that you care about him as a person, not as some sort of notch on your spiritual gun belt.

Conclusion

Close the class with a time of prayer, in which you encourage the Christian students in your class to pray that God would give them opportunities to witness to those entrapped by the cults and then give wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit in carrying out that witness faithfully.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

RESPONDING TO THE CULTIST

1. How can learning about the cults help Christians to know the truth of the Bible better?
2. What are some of the ways that a Christian can help protect himself and others against the seductiveness of the cults?
3. In witnessing to someone who is involved with a cult, how is your use of the Word of God likely to be received? Why is it important to keep in mind the fact that the Bible has power only when it is applied by the Holy Spirit?
4. What are some of the ways in which you can show love to a cultist to whom you are seeking to witness?
5. In preparation for witness to someone from a cult, put together a list of the basic teachings of the Christian faith, along with passages of Scripture where those teachings may be found. Then commit the list to memory.